

# The Rogue Titan

**By: Spartan Ninja**

AU from the 8th episode onwards. What if Eren was conscious when he emerged from his Titan form. What if, rather than possibly facing execution inside the Walls, he fled outside in self imposed exile. After training for months outside in the Titan infested wilderness, Eren Jaeger shall no longer fight for humanity as a soldier, but as the Rogue Titan. There'll be ErenXMikasa later.

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# Chapter 1

AN: Seid ihr das Essen? Nein, wir sind der Jäger! \*swings in on 3D Maneuver Gear\* Hello my fellow authors and loyal readers, yours truly, the Spartan Ninja, has returned! \*bows his head as he slams his right fist over his heart and holds the left behind his back\* \*looks up\* Now, for those of you who follow my Halo story, I have had a lot think on it in the past few months. \*relaxes his stance\* Now don't think I'm discontinuing it, because I'm not. However, it needs a lot of work. Right now though, as you can tell by my attire \*gestures to scouting legion uniform and gear\* I have another passion I must attend to. For those of you who are new to me, however, it's pretty obvious because you found this story for the story and not me. Shingeki no Kyojin is definitely one of the best anime/manga series' right now, and so I am accepting a writing challenge from HighQueen's tumblr, theotakulyfe; who you should totally check out because she's awesome and encouraged me to do this challenge because she lacks the time due to her own fics and real life. \*shudders\* Ugh, real life. Tumblr and the internet are so much better. By the way, shameless self-advertising here, my tumblr is the exact same name, except no space, so yeah, follow me and stuff. Anyway, the challenge is a divergence off of the eighth episode of the anime, where instead of just kneeling there as his Titan body collapses after killing the Titan that ate Thomas; Eren has the energy to escape outside the walls that humanity still control. Everyone would think he's dead, at least at first, and during that time he would learn how to use his powers more effectively. He would then start helping humanity, fighting the Titans as the Rogue Titan on occasion, before disappearing again so he can escape. Now for the shippers out there, it will eventually be MikEren or EreMika, however you want call the ship, fic . Other ships will come up passively, but the challenge only demanded the one ship. Anyone else taking this up doesn't have to follow that part, but personally, I ship them to Japan and back and find they will be canon if they survive. Also, this will be rated M because its Attack on Titan, itis blood and gore central. Also though, when I start giving attention to ships, I will have no limits to

the possible interactions. There won't be chapter upon chapter of smut, but there will be intimacy. Fair warning/advertising, depending on how you view it. Now, I don't know how long I am going to write this; HighQueen said that I should start it as a threeshot, just to test the waters, and in my opinion, it might also encourage others to take up the challenge. But if I get a lot of support on this, I can see this going ten to twenty chapters, depending on how deep the manga goes during the writing process. Wow, I've already written a full page here, and I'm still in the Author's Note. Well, let's put an end to that then. As one bushy browed commander said, "ONWARD" with the story: I present to you, "The Rogue Titan"

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Year 850, Day 0 after the Fall of Trost District

With one final cry of defiance, the Deviant Class Titan fell with an earth shattering crash. The steam coming off its body only further proved the obvious; the Titan than helped them survive had died.

"Looks like it burnt itself out," Jean said. He turned to begin the final break for the wall. "Whatever, let's get going! There's no way that monster's on our side. Titans are Titans." Glancing back, he noticed that not one of his comrades made to follow him. Instead, their focus was on the rapidly decaying Titan corpse. "What is it?" he queried as he returned next to Annie and Armin. Looking down, he noticed that there was an abnormal amount of steam coming from the nape of the Titans neck compared to the rest of the body.

And then there was a figure.

It wasn't large like a Titan, not even one of the 3 meter classes from inside the tower. No, it was definitely human sized, yet it was coming from inside the Titan's neck. It took a moment to gain its bearings before it looked around at the surrounding carnage. Jean couldn't tell what the figure was emerging from the steam, which probably went the same for the rest of the soldiers on the roof.

"Hey, you down there," Jean shouted, pointing one of his blades downward at the figure. It looked up, still shrouded by the steam, acknowledging Jean's shouts. "Are you Titan, or human?"

"Jean, what are you doing?" Armin asked, "Whoever that is just saved our lives. We shouldn't scare away a potential ally"

"Potential ally, are you kidding me? Whoever or whatever that is just emerged from a Titan, an extremely powerful one at that. For all we know, this could be a trick to get within the walls, and then who knows what kind of havoc it might cause."

"Well whoever or whatever it is, they're made a break for the Tower," Reiner commented calmly.

Jean and Armin turned in time to see the outline of the figure enter the building they had escaped only moments earlier.

"There you go; if it was human it wouldn't have run away from us. Now come on, let's get over the wall before anymore Titans arrive," Jean exclaimed. Annie, Reiner, and Bertholdt nodded in agreement, then took off across the roofs. Mikasa and Armin however remained staring at the door the stranger had fled through. Jean could see it in the slight movements of their hands; they were planning on going after that thing that came out of the Titan. Reaching out, he grabbed both of them by the collars of their jackets and pulled them back.

"Snap out of it you two, we have to go," he said, putting the emphasis on the "have". Finally getting their attention, Jean let go of their collars and met their disgruntled looks with a calmer voice.

"Look, as much as I'd love to follow you two after- well, whatever that was- we have to face facts. We are still in enemy territory, despite what this was only a few hours ago. Last time the Walls were breached, it wasn't just a District Wall that fell, but the main one too. The Garrison is going to need every soldier available on the Walls to stop the Armored Titan if he makes an appearance. Instead of that though, you two want to go deeper into enemy territory after who knows what. Maybe it'll be an ally, maybe it won't, but it won't be worth it if you both die while Wall Rose falls."

Armin and Mikasa were not happy, but couldn't argue with Jean's logic. If Rose fell, a lot more people were going to die than when Maria did.

"He's right Mikasa, we need to pull back now. If we report this to one of the ranking officers we might be able to send a search and rescue squad for whoever that was later." Jean nodded in agreement, though internally he doubted even the Survey Corps would be willing to risk attempting such a mission.

Mikasa looked between the two before coming to her decision. Firing her wires, she prepared to go after the figure.

"Mikasa," Jean shouted as he reached out to stop her. All he managed to do was grab a hold of her scarf, which came undone in his hand as she flew forwards. "Fuck!" Now Jean was conflicted; there was no way he wanted to become Titan food, but at the same time he did not want to leave Mikasa behind. "Dammit all," he hissed as he made to follow, only his wires to bounce off the creepiest smile he had seen today. He froze as a giant hand rose to smash him.

Before he could lose yet another comrade though, Armin tackled Jean out of the way of the descending palm. "Come on Jean, as you said, we need to make it to the Wall," Armin stated, picking himself up. Grabbing Jean's hand he helped him up before they began sprinting back towards the Wall.

As they made their escape, a long piece of red fabric found its way down to the street below, finding a place amongst the rubble and steaming corpses.

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Inside the Tower, the figure everyone had observed earlier was hiding in one of the inner rooms, away, from prying eyes.

"I was... inside... a Titan? N-No, I was a... There's no way I was a... a Titan." Hidden under a desk within one of the Tower's inner rooms, Eren swallowed hard, unable to come to terms with the reality of his

situation. "It was just a dream. Yeah, that's it, it-it was just a stupid dream," he chuckled for a moment before he slammed his fist onto the floor, ending his faux reverie. "What am I saying, the proof is right in front of me!"

Indeed it was, as both his left arm and leg were attached to his body, yet the cloth at the joints were torn, as if it was bitten through. He had not only stepped out of the corpse of one of the Titans that lumbered about outside, but he had regenerated his body just like them. He was a monster.

The sound of boots hitting stone pulled him from his introspection. "Hello, is anyone here?" It was Mikasa. "Don't hide, please, I'm friendly. Whoever you are, we could really use your help."

Help? How could he help? He was a monster, a Titan. They never help humans, only eat them.

Yet he felt no such desire. A flicker of doubt lit within himself against the thought of being the same as those murder machines outside. Even in that other body, as far as he could recall, all he felt was an intense desire to kill Titans.

What if he could help humanity? Maybe all was not lost for him. He almost laughed at the ridiculousness of the idea; a Titan fighting for humanity, yet that was exactly what it would be if he were to return behind the Walls.

Just as he was about to call out to Mikasa though, Jean's voice rang through his skull. 'Are you Titan, or human?' 'There you go; if it was human it wouldn't have run away from us.' There was loathing and hate dripping from his voice when he shouted earlier; undoubtedly if he were to reveal himself, humanity as a whole would meet him with equal, if not greater, amounts of both. His execution would be almost assured, even if Mikasa, even if all the cadets of the 104th, vouched for him.

Eren replaced himself back to his hiding place until he heard the sound of Mikasa moving away.

"Even if I'm not a monster, I look exactly like one. I can't go back, not if I want the chance to fight and make a difference." Sighing in resignation, Eren pulled himself to his feet. "I need supplies if I'm going to be moving outside the Walls. But I won't be able to do that if I get caught."

Eren hastily made his way through to the top of the Tower and waited for Mikasa to leave. After about 45 minutes he finally saw a figure flying a ways north towards the Main Wall.

"Mikasa," he whispered, afraid if he said her name any louder she would hear him and come back; either to drag him back or go with him, neither of which were viable options. He needed to go alone, so everyone would think he was dead and no one would be hurt because of him, especially Mikasa. Already she was a soldier because of him. He only hoped that after this experience she'd join the Military Police, or at least the Stationary Guard, rather than the Survey Corps like he had wished too. At least then she'd be safe.

Eren sighed. He was going to miss everyone from the trainee squad, but Mikasa was definitely going to be the one he'd miss most. He'd miss Armin dearly too, he was his best friend after all, oldest one too, and shared with him his vast trove of knowledge and forbidden books on the outside world. But surviving a traumatic childhood with just each other as he and Mikasa had created a closeness between them he doubted he would form elsewhere.

Pulling his gaze away from her retreating figure, his eyes caught something lying in the street amongst the rubble and Titan remains: a red scarf, his red scarf. Scanning quickly for any nearby Titans, Eren made a break down the flights of stairs, and, against all better judgment, retrieved it before making a hasty retreat back into the building.



"Mikasa left this behind? Why would she do that?" Unable to answer his own question, Eren returned the garment around his neck. Taking a deep breath, he noticed it smelled faintly like her. A sad smile graced his lips for a brief moment as he returned to the interior of the Tower.

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"We stick with the plan," Reiner growled, slamming his fist into the wall he was standing in front of. In the rear of one of Trost's abandoned buildings with him were Bertholdt and Annie.

"But Reiner, what about that Titan Shifter back there? You saw what he did to all those Titans around the Tower," Bertholdt exclaimed, worried as to the implications this new variable could hold for them.

"It doesn't matter. We all saw him run off after he exited the Titan. He may have no love for other Titans, but it's more than safe to assume he's not with anyone behind the Walls." Reiner crossed his arms as he continued calmly. "Even if he is, it's unlikely he understands how to use his powers judging by how he was fighting. It was probably dumb luck he transformed, and more likely than not he'll be Titan chow in the next hour or so."

"Should we help him then? What if he's the coordinate, shouldn't we try to take him back to the village?" Bertholdt questioned, seeming to have calmed down as the topic shifted.

"No," Reiner replied tersely.

"But-"

"We can't risk the mission on a hunch. Breaking down the Walls is our first priority, we cannot get distracted." Reiner's voice began to increase in volume again.

"It wouldn't be a distraction though, just a slight detour," Bertholdt responded, trying to calm Reiner.

"Slight detour! He could be anywhere in Trost right now, including a Titan's stomach. We cannot go after him, right Annie?" Reiner turned to the quiet girl, who up until then had been content listening to the two go back and forth. Pushing off the wall, she turned to Bertholdt.

"Breaking through the Wall is our most pressing matter right now. Reiner needs to complete his part without distraction; otherwise things could go bad for him. However," she turned to Reiner now, "both Bertholdt and I are otherwise unoccupied."

"Are you saying we should stay behind to look for him?" Bertholdt uttered, a little bit of fear leaking through his voice.

"No, not us, just me," Annie stepped closer to him. "You go back to the Wall, tell them that Reiner's gear broke and that I needed guard him as he makes his way back. That should cover us for a while until Reiner shifts. We'll slip back in during the confusion. Hopefully I'll be able to find our friend before then. Any objections?"

Bertholdt shook his head. Reiner wasn't so accepting. Speaking up again, he asked, "How long will it take for you to find him?"

"Give me a little more than an hour once we leave here before you shift. Like I said, there will be confusion and chaos after the Wall falls. I'll have plenty of time after that to keep searching. And unlike you said Reiner, he won't be anywhere. More likely than not, he's still in the Tower, and if not there, somewhere nearby." She was now turned to face Reiner, eyebrow raised as she waited for an answer.

Reiner sighed in acceptance. "Okay, I'll go with this. Just don't take too long, okay, we still have to make it back alive and with our covers intact."

She nodded. "Wait half an hour before heading back Bertholdt, we don't want to have to deal with a rescue party actually finding us out."

Nodding, Bertholdt took a seat against the wall as Annie and Reiner made their way through the back exit. Heading up along the roofs from the back alley, they made their way westward in order to loop around to the breach and Tower while avoiding Armin, Jean, and Mikasa. The plan would continue.

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On the top of the Wall, the surviving cadets were talking amongst themselves as they awaited orders from their superiors.

"Are you sure you weren't just seeing things back there Armin. You were pretty shell shocked when we found you after... well, you know." Connie's voice petered away as he recollected what happened to Armin's squad.

"No, I know for sure what I saw. Someone stepped out of the neck of that Deviant Class Titan, right where we normally cut them," Armin described for the 5th time since he and Jean made it back to the Wall. "You saw it happen Jean. Tell them."

Up until then Jean had just been sitting to the side, ignoring the conversations going on for the most part. He too was a bit shaken up, not so much by the death of his best friend, but rather by the sheer number of comrades that he watched die under his leadership. It weighed heavy on his mind. Even Marco was giving him some distance. "Huh, you say something?"

"Did you see a person emerge from the back of that Titan's neck," Connie repeated for Armin.

Jean's countenance visibly soured. "Tch, yeah, I saw someone exit the Titan's neck, just like Armin said, as did Mikasa, Reiner, Bertholdt, and Annie, though I doubt you can call whatever came out of that thing a person. I still can't believe we left Mikasa behind to go after it." He spat those last few words out.

"Speaking of those three, where are they? I haven't seen them on the Wall since we've arrived," Armin asked.

"They haven't shown up as far as we've seen. Maybe they just went up along a different part of the Wall," Marco offered as an explanation.

Just as he finished, the whizzing sound of metal wires could be heard from over the side of the Wall. Heads turned to the source, the cadets witnessed Bertholdt make his way over the edge and onto the top of the Wall. As he landed, panting on one knee, the other cadets circled around Bertholdt, anxious to know what happened to him.

"Bertholdt, what happened to you? Where are Annie and Reiner?" Connie exclaimed.

Taking several gulps of air, he responded. "Titans... \*gasp\* Titans got Reiner," he exhaled.

A resounding what came from the cadets.

"Is he..." Sasha's unfinished question hung heavy in the air.

Bertholdt shook his head. "No, Annie saved him. However, his gear was damaged. Annie opted to stay behind and guard him while he makes his way back."

"And you aren't with them, why?" Jean growled as he stormed from his seat into Bertholdt's face. Forgetting what he said earlier to Mikasa and Armin, he internally cursed the giant cadet in front of him. How dare this chicken abandon his comrades to the Titans.

"T-they said I should g-go ahead, that if the Armored T-Titan appeared, th-they'd need all the soldiers th-they can get." Bertholdt stuttered this out, intimidated by Jean's reaction. This caused him to back off, as the implications hit home not only for Jean, but everyone present.

"If that were to happen, and it broke through Wall Rose..." Connie began.

"The Titans would flow through the breach, just like they did five years ago," Marco finished.

"No, it would be much worse," Armin concluded darkly. Everyone's head turned to face him. "Last time the Walls were breached, we lost over a third of our territory and sent a fifth of our population to their deaths so everyone else wouldn't starve. If Rose falls, we would lose more than half this time. That added to the fact that we are just barely getting by food wise, more than half of the population will have to die this time for humanity to live."

For a moment, you could hear the sounds of the Titans stomping below as everyone became deathly quiet. Each cadet played the possible situations out in their heads, varying between refugees being left for dead outside Wall Sina to civil war amongst the survivors and military divisions. None of it ended well, especially with the prospects of these Deviant Titans reappearing again to break down Sina in the future.

While everyone else was pondering this, a ghost of a grin graced Bertholdt's face for a moment, until the sound of whizzing wires could be heard again. Mikasa's returned to see her fellow cadets with solemn expressions gracing their visages.

The lack of a second figure and shake of head conveyed the results of her search to Armin. Jean noticed this too and huffed in approval, thinking the figure was a monster for sure if it wouldn't allow itself to be found.

Before anything could be said, a large explosion could be heard originating from the Breach. In the distance, emerging from a huge cloud of dust was a discolored, skinless, 15-meter class Titan.

The Armored Titan had made its appearance.

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Eren spent the last half an hour running through the halls of the Tower, gathering everything he'd need in order to live outside the

Walls. This included several sets of uniforms found within the castle-like structure, including one to replace his torn outfit, two sets of 3D Maneuver Gear sans belts with gas tanks and blades, four extra gas tanks, a bedroll, a fire starter, three canteens of water, and as many ration bars as he could find, all stuffed into an oversized hiking bag similar to the ones used during training.

After equipping a third set of 3D Maneuver Gear, Eren slid the pack straps over his shoulders and almost lost his balance. Even with three years of intense muscle training for in order to use the gear, the weight of the pack was great enough to throw off his center of balance. "Take care Eren, screwing up with this pack is going to be much worse than normal."

He hiked up to the top of the Tower to get an idea of where the clearest exit to the Outer Wall was. As he scanned, he noticed a figure flying along the roof tops a ways to the South, near the breach.

'Wait, that's not flying,' Eren thought as he saw the figure deftly dodge the lunges of several Titans, two of which fell in its wake, steam emerging from the back of their necks. 'That's 3D Maneuver Gear. A soldier in 3D Maneuver Gear is heading for the breach?' The questions emerging today just kept increasing. Soon the figure descended below the roof line, but Eren could still keep track of them for a while based on the direction of the lumbering Titans in the soldier's general direction.

Putting yet another peculiarity behind him, he turned south-east with his guards in hand; ready to begin his trek out of the city.

"Going somewhere Eren?"

Eren's blood froze cold. He'd been caught. Turning around, he saw a short female figure equipped in 3D Maneuver Gear leaning against the opposite wall, staring at him. She was missing the military standard jacket but had a white hoodie beneath the belts. Her hood

was up, covering her eyes, and a mask covered the lower half of her face.

"How do you know my name?" he asked the figure. She felt familiar, yet he couldn't quite put his finger on her identity.

"Is that really your first question? Not, 'who are you' or 'how'd you find me'?" Eren shook his head. "Fine, let's just say that I'm part of a group that has witnessed your unique ability. We're quite interested in bringing in another individual like us."

"Like... us?" Eren was taken aback. There were others like him?

"Yes Eren, there are others like you who can shift into Titans, and we want you to join us. We can take you back to our village and teach you how to control your power."

Eren was stunned to say the least. So there weren't just a few individuals like him, but an entire village. There could very well be some with decades of experience, and they were willing to teach him how to use his power. He wondered how the Scouting Legion hadn't found this place yet, but put that thought aside when remembering how big the world was according to Armin's book. If he could learn to control his power, he could help destroy the other Titans and free humanity. He would be able to see the world with Armin, just like he promised so many years ago. And of course knowing Mikasa, she would come along too. The prospect was almost too good to be true.

"We just need to finish the other part of our mission first," she finished.

"Wait, wh-" an explosion could be heard coming from the south. The following tremor almost knocked him off his feet. Righting himself, he saw, emerging from the falling dust and wreckage, the Armored Titan.

Stuck in shock, Eren almost didn't hear the figure rushing towards him.

Almost.

He turned with his arms up, just in time to block the figure from striking him over the head with the sword guard. Thank Annie for the sparring practice.

With the strike block, he pushed the figure back off balance, if only for a moment. In that brief period of respite, Eren dropped the hiking bag and pulled out the blades from his gear, pointing one at the figure.

"You're with them; with the Titans?" Eren spat.

The figure didn't respond at first, instead putting herself into a fighting stance, both blades drawn as well. "I am required to take you alive Eren; whether it's willing as one, or unwilling in pieces." With that she charged him, slashing down at both his arms.

Eren raised his blades to block, and soon the two of them were engaged in combat. Fists, kicks, and blades flew between them, but nothing connected that cut the skin or debilitated either of their movements.

As they continued to clash, Eren's gaze drifted back to observe the Armored Titan. It was lining itself up for a straight shot at the gate. It was going to breach the Walls again.

'No, that can't happen again. I have to stop him!' he thought.

Blocking another strike meant to take off an arm, Eren slipped past the figure and jumped, firing his wires at the nearest building.

"Damn it," the figure muttered as she made to follow him.

Maneuvering between buildings and along rooftops, Eren watched as the Armored Titan began its charge. Adjusting his course, he set himself on a path where he would transform and hit it mid charge, preventing any possibility of it dodging.



Said Titan was unaware of the rapidly approaching figure as it began its charge. Only when Eren flew above the final set of buildings did it notice him, but just ignored the solitary soldier, confident its plating would hold up against the blades.

Bad move.

Eren replaced his blades and bit down on his hand. The taste of warm iron filled his mouth, and then everything went white with a bang.

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A.N.: Wow, that was a lot of writing, almost five thousand words. Apologies if anything is off, I did try my best to keep true to the anime and manga. Depending on how well this is received will decide how quickly and how many updates there are. I know where I want this to go and stuff, just how rapidly it goes depends on your responses. Just so you all know though, I am in college now, so even if I am feeling really good about writing this story, that stuff has to take precedence over writing. I will still do my best to keep you all entertained though. After finishing this chapter I am definitely feeling more than three chapters, at least six, and again, the more support I get from my readers, the more I will want to do. Now I must take my leave. There is a world to reclaim for humanity and Titans that are waiting to be killed. Please remember to read and review.  
YAAAAAAA \*fires wires and flies off into the distance\*

## Chapter 2

AN: TITANS! \*flies forward, aiming at the Titan's neck with his swords\* DIE! \*gets caught in its hand\* Oh shit oh shit OH SH- oh, hey Eren; sorry about that, thought you were one of the regular Titans. \*he does not look amused\* Since you're here, got anything to share with the readers? \*he shakes his head, pointing at his mouth with his free hand\* Ah, that's right, you're mute in your Titan form. Well then, could you let me go at least? \*nods as he opens his hand\* Thanks Eren. Wish Mikasa and Ymir a happy belated birthday for me please. \*Leaps down from Eren's hand\* Welcome back my loyal readers, to the second chapter of "The Rogue Titan". I received almost completely positive reviews from the last chapter, which have encouraged me to work on this ASAP. Twenty-two reviews on the first chapter does that to a person. One reviewer pointed out that I botched Annie's response a bit after Eren saw the Armored Titan, so that's fixed. Hope you're good now random guest. \*gives a nice guy pose\* Also, it seems that the challenger found and reviewed my story. A big thanks to popo1212123 for coming up with the prompt and another shout-out to High Queen/theotakulyfe for challenging me to take this up. Go check her out when you're done with this chapter if you haven't already. Maybe she'll update faster if you read and review her stuff too. Now without further ado, I present to you chapter two.

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On the other side of the Wall, all available Garrison soldiers stood ready, armed with rifles and cannons. They were prepared for the worst, and for a split second they thought that was exactly what happened.

A loud crack and crash echoed through the air, and in that moment they thought that the gate had been breached and all was lost. But when pieces of the gate did not crush them all, they were left wondering what had just happened.

Those on the Wall knew exactly what had happened. They had been watching as the Armored Titan charged straight for the gate. From the side they saw two figures in 3D Maneuver Gear heading towards it, as though they might be able to stop it.

"Do those two have a death wish," Jean spoke aloud, voicing everyone else's concern in that moment. Except Bertholdt.

He could recognize the white hoodie from a mile away on the second soldier. If she was following the other figure, then that meant the lead one was...

His eyes went wide in realization as the lead figure's hand was brought to its mouth. Right there was when Fubar realized that the mission may have gone F.U.B.A.R.

There was a bright light that was followed by the sound of thunder, a second later followed by the charging Titan crashing on top of several buildings as a large body slammed into it from the side.

The survivors of the Tower stood in awe at the sight they were beholding.

"Is that..." Sasha began.

"No way," Connie stated.

Jean couldn't seem to decide whether he was grateful or disturbed by the course things had just taken.

Armin was, internally, elated by the turn of events.

And Mikasa, she was simply awestruck.

Standing over the Armored Titan, releasing the loudest roar any of them had ever heard, was the reification, the physical manifestation, of mankind's anger...

The Rogue Titan had returned.

Annie landed on one of the roofs along the edge of the destruction wrought by Eren's collision with Reiner. Seeing him stand over Reiner like that made her want to turn and remove that "superior expression" from his face. Before she could draw the blade from her ring however, a giant fist slammed its way through Eren's chest, spraying bone, blood, and gore through his back.

He tried to stumble back and remove the fist from within his torso in order heal, but as Reiner regained his footing he forced his arm deeper in him. Seeing that he had Eren under control, Annie was content with just watching things play out.

With his elbow almost through the other side, Reiner locked his arm with other one around Eren's side and began to lift him. Not to say Eren wasn't resisting this. No, he was pounding mercilessly against the skull and back of the offending Titan, but only succeeded in creating hairline fractures in the armor whilst destroying his hands in the process.

Reiner turned Eren in the air and slammed him on his side, crushing his arm and shoulder under the force of the blow. He then stepped on Eren's gut and ripped his gore coated arm through Eren's side and returned to his full height. He then raised his foot and, before Eren could block or dodge, slammed it down on the Titan Shifter's skull several times, leaving Eren headless. Figuring Annie could deal with the thoroughly incapacitated coordinate, Reiner walked back to the start of his previous path. The Titans were starting to gather and would soon swarm him if he didn't finish soon.

As Reiner expected, Annie moved towards the fallen Titan Shifter, intent on cutting him out and ending this godforsaken mission.

"There goes mister Nice Titan," Jean commented sarcastically. Though no one else there would admit it, everyone there felt a bit despondent in that moment. Once again their potential ally was struck down, thoroughly defeated.

"Why's the Armored Titan running away?" Christa voiced timidly. Indeed, as she said, the Titan was running for the breach along the main road. About half a kilometer before it reached it though, it stopped.

Everyone's blood ran cold once again.

It turned.

It was going to charge the Wall again.

It began to pick up speed.

And this time...

It was at a dead sprint now.

Nothing would stop it.

"It's coming Armin yelled over the other side of the Wall. It took all of five seconds for the troops of the Garrison to break ranks in a panic. Bodies flew through the air as guns were dropped and cannons left abandoned. A few of the more steeled individuals stood their ground, prepared for the worst.

Unfortunately those that stayed behind were blown away and/or crushed as the Armored Titan crashed through the gate. Anyone caught mid-flight was slammed against one surface or another and a number of those on top of the Wall were shaken off by the vibrations, sent tumbling towards the ground. Quick reflexes on their own parts and of their comrades saved the majority, but a few souls weren't so fortunate. Their corpses were strewn across the rubble those of the defenders on the ground.

Not a far ways from the new breach, the Armored Titan just stood there, as though it were just a statue. It provided an all too tempting target for a number of the Garrison with their wits still about them. Among them was Counter Squad Commander Hannes.

"Soldiers, this is our chance! The Armored Titan is within our grasp! If we take it out, we shall stop the advance of the Titans here and now!"

Shouts could be heard all around the breach, as the Garrison soldiers prepared to strike back. The majority of them began to take up positions along the roofs around the Titan, while a handful moved amongst the wreckage in order to find any surviving soldiers. The rest took up positions at the remaining cannons, including those at the top of the walls. Concentrating fire on the breach, they'd hopefully be able to hold off the Titans.

Watching events unfold were cadets atop the Wall.

"W-we should probably g-go down there and help find survivors," Christa stuttered out.

"There aren't going to be many survivors down there," Connie replied. Indeed, looking down the human side of the wall yielded a field of shattered stone and body parts, a few members of the Garrison picking through it all in an attempt to find a living soul with not much luck.

"So you're saying you'd rather to go fight that thing?" Ymir said sarcastically, pointing her thumb at the Armored Titan. It was holding its own against the Garrison soldiers, whittling down their numbers in ones and twos by stomping, smashing, and crushing, though surprisingly not eating, them, all the while not even getting a scratch on his body. Several of the cadets' eyes widened at the prospect of doing that, though one pair wasn't exactly widened in fear for himself.

"N-no, I j-just thought th-that-"

"We need to get to that Deviant Titan," Armin stated flatly, looking into Trost District..

"Y-yeah, that," Connie said, trying to save face.

"Why the hell should we do that?" Jean shouted.

"That Titan is undoubtedly the same one that fell outside the tower. If the Armored Titan didn't crush its nape, we can save whoever was in it. If he's alive, Wall Rose might not be lost."

"How do you figure that? Even if whatever's in that body can become a Titan again, it's still one against who knows how many other Titans. There's no way it can win!" Jean exclaimed

"It's only endless as long as the breach is open," he said.

"Dammit it Armin, speak straight for once. What are you saying?"

Mikasa gave him a nod of approval when he glanced at her. Taking a deep breath, Armin continued. "That boulder over there," he pointed towards the eastern part of the district, "it's been too large and dense to remove by conventional means. I'm willing to bet that a Titan can move it though. More specifically-

"That Deviant Titan," Sasha finished for him.

"Exactly. If we can get it to move the boulder in front of the first breach, the flow of Titans will be stopped. We'd just have to clear a path so it can move it. Then it's just a matter of killing those that remain."

"But that includes..." Connie looked back at where the Garrison were engaged with the Armored Titan.

"We can worry about that later. Armin's plan seems sound enough. I'm in," Marco stated.

"So am I," Mikasa said.

Looking between the two, Jean sighed at the incredulousness of the situation. "I can't believe we're going to do this."

The rest of the cadets present fell in with the plan, save one.

"I-I'm not too sure about this guys. W-What if we're wrong a-and it does eat humans too? If we're the only ones r-right next to it, w-what'll stop it from attacking us?" Bert stuttered out.

A couple of unsure glances were shared before Armin spoke up again. "This is a risk is that needs to be taken. Doing otherwise would break our oath as soldiers, and though some might say otherwise in this case, it would be tantamount to treason. I will not betray humanity, especially in such a dire time as this."

"R-right," Bert sighed.

"Any other objections?" If there were, none were voiced. "Then let's go."

One by one the cadets of 104th flew of the Wall towards what might be the only thing that could save humanity.

"Annie's going to be pissed," Bertholdt whispered before following his "comrades".

---

'Dammit, he had to roll onto his back, didn't he,' Annie cursed mentally. She was standing beside the neck of Eren's Titan form. After Reiner crushed his head she figured it would be pretty easy to extract Eren from the nape of his neck. But no, the crushed skull was still attached and healing, though at an extremely slow rate, along with the rest of his body. With the nape between hundreds of pounds of crushed flesh and the ground, Annie was more than a little annoyed.

She began hacking at the side of the neck, partially in hopes to outpace the healing factor and get to the coordinate, but mostly in order to vent her frustration at the fact that they were so close yet still so far. Thankfully no Titans have taken notice of her or the corpse, but that could change at any moment.



'Come on, come on,' she yelled mentally, hacking away at more and more flesh, only for it to begin to heal again. The distant sounds of Titans walking were beginning to get louder.

Annie was beginning to seriously consider turning, just so she could end this godforsaken mission and get home. She could feel the thumping of the approaching Titans now.

Turning from the corpse towards the gap between the houses Eren had made, she observed a thirteen and two ten meter class Titans passing by. One of the ten meter ones noticed her, and began approaching the two of them, the other two following in tow.

'Fuck,' was the only word that ran through her head in that moment. She readied one of her blades to cut herself, but just as it was about to bite the skin, a blur passed the leading ten meter Titan, just behind its neck. A moment later it fell over right in front of her. Two more blurs passed behind the other Titans before they fell as well.

Standing on the remains of one of the buildings were Mikasa, Jean, and Bertholdt. Landing across from them on the other side of the gap were Connie, Sasha, Ymir, Christa, Marco, and Armin. Thinking quickly, she stepped over into the closest alley present before running away, hoping no one saw her.

She was unfortunately a little too slow, as Jean saw movement at the edge of the alley way. "Did you see that?" he asked.

"Y-yeah, I did," Bertholdt replied.

"Think we should check it out? Wouldn't want a Titan to get the jump on when we aren't looking."

"Yeah, y-you're right. I'll go ahead. If it's small enough to hide between the building I-I should be able to take care of it," Bertholdt stated, seeming more confident abilities than usual. He launched himself across the roofs over the space he saw the figure escape.

The remaining cadets took up positions around the fallen Titan as it slowly healed. The distant thundering of Titan steps and cannon fire could be heard in the distance. Another ten meter class and a seven meter class Titan stumbled upon them but were quickly dispatched by Mikasa and Connie.

Soon enough, the Titan's skull and reformed, along with the rest of the damage. Something wasn't right though. Even though it was healed, it wouldn't move.

Armin leapt down from his position and approached the side of its head.

"Hello? Are you awake in there?" No response.

'What the hell is he doing,' was the collective thought of most of the present cadets.

"Whoever you are, we need your help." Still no response.

"I know you're alive. Please, if you can hear me, listen. The Titans, those things you hate so much and have been killing all day, they're killing humanity, my people, by the thousands. If they aren't stopped, they will cease to exist. If we work together, we can defeat the Titans, not just here, but everywhere. So please, help us!" As Armin spoke, his voice became faster and more passionate until he was almost screaming the final line. After a minute of waiting though, the fallen deviant had still not awoken.

Armin released a sigh as he prepped his blades. He stepped on top of the Titan's shoulder and launched both wires into the side of the Titan's neck before drawing them taught. Replacing one of his blades, he pointed the other one downwards with both hands on the hilt and drove it as deep as he could through the juncture of the shoulder and neck, hoping that he was right and that it would hit the person without killing him.

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"Where are you Annie?" Bertholdt asked himself. He'd dropped down into the alleyway after clearing a couple of roofs in case any of his fellow cadets decided to follow after him. Unfortunately, Annie had a similar sense of avoidance, as she had made herself very discreet. He began calling her name. "Annie!"

"Not so loud Bert, you'll attract attention." Said cadet screamed as he spun around to see his fellow Titan Shifter, who was standing casually with her hood and mask down as though she was there the entire time. She seemed pretty miffed, though not necessarily at him. "What're they doing here?"

"Armin wants to use that Titan to plug up the hole I made in the Wall. He's hoping that after that that maybe it'll work with humanity to fight the Titans."

Her frowned deepened before she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Then we just have to make sure they fail, otherwise Eren is sure to go with them."

"Wait, that Titan, the coordinate, is Eren? I thought Armin said he was eaten?" He was shell shocked? They were never more than 100 meters from their target for the better part of three years and they only just now learned this? It was unbelievable.

"Well he's wrong. I caught Eren in the Tower with pack full of supplies. If I didn't know him I wouldn't have guessed it, but it seems he was planning on going outside the Walls." A upward tick in her lips momentarily gave away her thoughts. Eren was brave; crazy too, especially considering what the world was like beyond the Walls, but brave nonetheless. "Thinking about it now, that may work to our advantage. If he's outside the Walls, or at least this Wall, then there's nothing that could stop us from grabbing him. If Reiner and I were to go after him, then we'd be sure to capture him."

"And then we can go home?" Bert asked, just barely containing his excitement.

"Yes Bert, and then we can go home." A small, but genuine smile graced Annie's face.

"So what do we do to make sure he goes outside?"

She paused. "The best way I see this working out is if we allow Eren to plug up the breach. Once that's done, Reiner and I can run in and distract the them and any other soldiers present while Eren slips away. If that fails, and Eren doesn't slip away, then we'll either have to 'help him' escape or be a bit more direct in capturing him. You understand what that means, right Bert?"

"Y-yeah. Uh, hey, Annie..." Bert seemed to be really nervous now.

"Yes Bert?" An eyebrow rose, querying him as to what he was going to ask.

"When you and Reiner intercept Armin and the others, you two aren't... I mean you guys won't..." He couldn't finish asking, afraid as to what answer he might receive.

Annie's gaze dropped to the ground. She was reluctant to answer, but lying would only hurt them all in the end. "We'll do our best Bert, but-"

A roar that was beginning to become all too familiar cut her off before she could finish. They couldn't see it from here, but they knew Eren had woken up.

"Go, I'm going to get Reiner." Without a second thought, Annie launched herself towards the roofs, back towards the main Wall. Bertholdt watched her retreating form for few seconds until she disappeared, then turned to return to the others.

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Pain.

That was what Eren was feeling.

A very sharp pain in his arm woke him up from his slumber.

From his dream.

'It was only a dream?'

He was home. He was home and warm, wrapped in a giant blanket while Mikasa helped his mother with the dishes and his father read one of his medicine books. It was as though everything that happened in the past five years never happened.

But then suddenly his right arm was hurting as if one of those swords the soldiers used was stabbed through it. And then the dream started to fade; he desperately tried to hold onto it, reaching out to his family, but as he unknowingly slid back into reality, they slid into the darkness.

The darkness gave way to the orange sky of the approaching dusk. He was lying down.

Pushing himself off the ground, he found himself looking over the rooftops of the district. Occasionally the head of a Titan could be seen.

'That's right, I transformed into a Titan again. And...' he internally cringed as he remembered being thoroughly destroyed by the Armored Titan. His gaze fell on the Wall that he tried to save, only to see a gaping hole in it with a number of Titans approaching. Luckily they were being cut down by an increasing volume of cannon fire, but beyond the hail of explosives was the Armored Titan, fighting against a number of soldiers.

He wanted to face the Armored Titan again, no trick shots this time, and take him down; every fiber in his being said to charge forward. Yet when he began to take step forward, his hearing returned to him, and the first thing he heard was the screaming of a familiar voice.

"-op, please stop! Dammit we need your help! You're going to kill yourself if you go there!"

Eren turned his head to where the voice was, only to see a very flustered and terrified Armin. Looking down and around, he noticed a number of his well acquainted comrades were surrounding him on the rooftops in battle ready stances, each with a mix of fierce determination and fear evident on their faces in different proportions.

He turned back to Armin, who seemed to have calmed down a little bit. He noticed that he was holding onto a sword that was imbedded into his neck, which reminded him of the pain he felt earlier.

He slowly brought an open hand up to his shoulder, knowing any overt motions might set off the soldiers below him. He made a cocking motion towards it with his head, which Armin hesitantly followed, jumping onto the outstretched appendage after removing his sword. Moving his hand in front of him, the two stood face to face.

"Can you speak?" Armin queried. Eren open his mouth to respond, but couldn't manage to speak, so instead he shook his head. "But you can understand me?" He nodded this time. "Good."

Armin felt triumphant. Really any soldier would if they managed to not only avoid getting eaten by a Titan, but also manage to communicate with it.

"I- we saw you before. You were killing Titans left and right; you even tried to take on the Armored Titan. You hate them too, right? Cause you're part human?"

It was an innocent enough question, or at least about as innocent as a traumatized teenager like Armin could ask. But the last two words resonated in him.

Part human.

He was not human. He was part human and part Titan. Definitely not something the military or humanity as a whole would likely accept.

After pausing for a bit, he nodded.

"Will you help us then? We need to stop more of them from coming in and kill those that are already here, but we can only do that with your help." Armin's head turned to look past Eren's head, towards the east side of the district, and pointed. The Titan turned its head to see what he was pointing to. "If we move that boulder in front of the hole in the Wall there," his hand moved to point at the hole the Colossal Titan made, "then we will stop the flow of Titans into the city. After that, it would only be a matter of killing those that remain within the Walls." Armin turned to face the Titan again. "If you can move the boulder, we'll keep the Titans off your back. Do you think you can lift it?"

This time Eren's nod was more resolute. He lowered his hand to the nearest rooftop to let Armin go before he began bounding towards the boulder.

"I cannot believe what just happened," Jean voiced next to Armin.

"Believe it Jean. We're one step closer to humanity's first victory against the Titans." Both Jean and Mikasa were taken a bit aback at this declaration. Was this real? Were they really about to defeat the Titans? "We still have a ways to go though, and anything can happen. We have to make sure everything goes according to plan." No, they still had much to do before they could say that they won. "Everyone, follow that Titan!" Armin yelled so everyone could hear. And they were off.

By some unforeseen miracle, the human-Titan team managed to reach the boulder without any casualties, at least not on their side. A number of Titans across their path were cut, smashed, and in the case of some smaller ones, punted out of existence. Along the way Bertholdt managed to catch up to them, flying along next to Jean to tell him that what he found. Apparently there was a pair of three

meter Titans that had wandered up the alley before turning back around towards the cadets. Thankfully he managed to deal with both of them.

Upon reaching the boulder, the cadets circled up around it to ensure "nothing got to the Rogue Titan," as Armin stated.

"You okay there Jean? You don't look well," Marco asked across the roof they were standing on.

"I'm fine, I just... this a lot to take in. We're working with a Titan, those things that are supposed to be the reason we're on the brink of extinction. It's hard to get out of the mentality that I should kill it now, before it turns on us and kills everyone. Tch, I will admit though, if this Titan's on our side we will be better off than before."

"Yeah, definitely. You shouldn't worry about it though. Armin's smart, he's probably got this Rogue Titan stuff figured out." He finished with a wide smile that put Jean a bit more at ease.

"Yeah, you're right he probably does." As he finished, he heard the loud rumble of earth shifting mixed with the Titan's roar. Turning, Jean saw what was now being known as the Rogue Titan lifting the giant boulder onto his shoulder and begin making its way towards the breach.

Armin wore a smug grin of satisfaction as things continued to go as planned while the rest of the cadets wore looks of awe at the sheer strength of the Titan in front of them. They were soon broken out of their stupor as said beast had moved outside their protective circle.

"This is it; the future of humanity relies on whether the breach into Trost is sealed," Armin said under his voice. Steeling himself for this final stretch, he turned to address his comrades. "Everyone, give this everything you've got! If we win, we live, but we can only win if we fight and fight with everything we have! So I'm telling you now, fight, fight, FIGHT!" With that, Armin charged after the Rogue Titan, leading the cadets into the fray what might be their final time.



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Mikasa knew who Armin got that final speech from. He used to say stuff like that whenever he talked about joining the military.

"Eren," she whispered. She sighed as she tried to nuzzle into it, only to be reminded that it was gone, lost in the heat of the day's battles. Her last physical manifestation of Eren's presence was gone. His spirit and iron will, however, would live on in both herself and Armin.

Armin. How he changed. In the course of the day he had gone from having given up, willing to give in to death's embrace, to leading his squad mates in what may be the most important mission humanity has undertaken since retreating behind the Walls. The fires of the day's events forged what she'd like to consider one of humanity's sharpest weapons. After all, no ordinary soldier would think of using a Titan to fight the Titans.

Taking out an 11 meter Titan bounding towards their group, her introspection turned to her thoughts about their unexpected ally. Everyone else was probably thinking this as well, but never in her life did she see herself working with a Titan, especially after what happened five years ago. Then again, this Titan wasn't the same as the mindless beasts her comrades had been fighting all day, or the one that ate Carla. There was a human underneath that form, and whoever he or she was, not only did Mikasa owe them her life, but so did the entire 104th, and if they succeed, everyone behind the Walls.

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It was during the final stretch, where the buildings opened into a clearing towards the breach, that things finally began to go to shit.

With the Rogue Titan going straight for the breach rather than going along the Wall, the cadets had to move onto the ground to continue to surround it. They split into four groups, Armin and Mikasa at the front left, Jean and Marco at the front right, Connie and Sasha at the rear left, and Ymir, Christa, and Bertholdt at the rear right. This formation didn't last long as the waves of Titans pouring through the

breach began to hone in on them, more specifically towards the Titan they were guarding.

Jean and Marco were the first to leap into the fray, tackling a 13 meter followed by two 10 meter Titans. A 7, 9, and 12 meter class were soon on top of them, which was when Christa, Ymir, and Bertholdt broke from the group. The five managed to keep the waves at bay, shifting from Titan to Titan in order to stay off the ground while Mikasa and Marco held off several stragglers on the left flank.

Then disaster struck.

As Christa flew upward with a burst of gas following a kill against a smaller Titan, she found himself flying straight into Jean's path. She tried to orient himself in the air so as to launch a wire downwards, but was unable to do so. She hit one of the wires, killing her momentum and sending her 10 meters towards the ground.

Ymir was on top of her almost immediately. She didn't pause to see if she was conscious, only that she was alive. Thankfully the blood coming from her head wasn't from a punctured artery, which could have easily happened after falling 10 meters onto her back. She just scooped her up, cradling Christa's head against her shoulder, and began making a break back for the buildings. Hopefully they'd be able to find safety inside one of the abandoned homes.

That hope seemed to dry up as several Titans began to pour from the streets between said buildings.

'If I turned now, I could get us both out of this mess. But then they'll know, and I doubt the military will be forgiving of that part of me.' She pushed herself to run faster, aiming for one of the windows. If she managed to get in before the Titans caught her, she could find a place to hide. Thankfully Christa was much lighter than the packs they were conditioned to run with, but even then she saw she wasn't going to make it.

Then the closest Titan fell. Sasha rounded along one of the roofs before aiming for another Titan. Connie hit a third before landing on the closest roof.

"Go, get her inside. We'll cover you," he shouted to her before jumping back into the fray.

'Thanks Shorty, I owe you and Potato Girl a big one,' she said internally.

She managed to get Christa inside; hiding her in a back room that none of the Titans could possibly see her in. After making sure that Christa would be fine for the time being, she began to make her way back to the fight. She'd have rather stayed behind and watched over this girl she loved, but as selfish as Ymir was, if things went pear shaped outside they'd all be dead. And so she returned to fight the not-so-good fight.

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Jean didn't fare much better, for though his wires were still firmly in the ground, Christa's momentum sent him off course. They caught on something as he flew to the side, sending him spiraling towards the center, ending with a hard smack against the object. He was briefly stunned, which was almost his undoing.

The object he had slammed into was a 9 meter's head, on the back thankfully, but before he was fully in control of his senses a giant hand was wrapped around his body and began moving him towards an open maw.

Just as it looked like the end for him, Marco managed to fly by and slice the monster's neck, sending both it and Jean to the ground. Landing beside him, Marco tried to help him up.

"Can you stand Jean," he asked as he hooked his friend's arm around his neck and pulled him from the ground.

"Yeah, I- AARGH." He yelled as he stumbled to the ground as he lost his balance.

"Jean, are al-?" his voice was caught in his throat as he saw one of Jean's legs ended shredded bits of bloody flesh and bone just below the kneecap. He had "saved" his friend a second too late. Looking around, a 15 meter Titans was making its way towards them, no more than 50 meters from them, with three 3-5 meter ones at its feet. Thinking fast, Marco drew his blades and sliced at the straps holding Jean's gear to his body, then moved to sling Jean onto his back. "Hang on Jean, I'll get you out of here." Despite the pain, he did manage to clasp his arms around Marco's neck, allowing him to run towards the Walls, where he'd leave his friend at the relative safety of the top.

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Reduced to six, the battle was beginning to wear thin on the cadets. Muscles were staining, blades were dulling, and gas was running out. The first to go down was Connie. Covering Ymir's retreat by taking out all the Titans to their rear used a lot of gas, even with his excellent use of momentum. Sasha obviously followed soon after, having done the same. Grounded, the two had no other option than to literally run intervention as Ymir and Bert took out any Titans that followed them.

Mikasa and Armin were the only two left protecting the Rogue Titan. Though the number of Titans was still unrelenting, they were almost at the breach. All they had to do was get the Titan past the trenches and they could make their escape.

That didn't pan out though, for when Armin landed after another kill, he found himself being lifted off the ground.

"MIKASA!" Said person was about to strike down another 11 meter Titan when she heard her name being shouted. Looking away briefly caused her to miss the strike, but rather wasting to attack it again, she had a new target: the 15 meter Titan that held Armin in its hand.

'Not again, I'm not losing Armin too!' Using her attachment to her original target as a fulcrum, she released an excess of gas, she did a rapid 270 degree turn around her original target before releasing her wires. Flying at Armin's captor, she removed the offending hand with her blades before quickly firing a cable into the beast's chest. The sharp turn that followed would have screwed up most soldiers' aim, even amongst the veterans, but Mikasa wasn't ranked first in the 104th for nothing. Her blades sliced through flesh like a hot knife through butter, and the beast fell.

Landing in a ready stance, she looked back at her friend, concern visible in her gaze. "Are you okay Armin?"

"N-no. My gear..." He sounded panicked, and he had every right to be. Kneeling on the ground he was bemoaning over what had once been his 3D Maneuver Gear. Now all it was were two bent and battered metal cases with air hissing out of the canisters.

"Dammit. Can you at least stand?" She was gritting her teeth in anger. They were so close to finally winning; but now, with two-thirds of their already small squad out of commission, it looked like even if humanity won, they would lose.

"Ah- yeah, I think I can," he gritted out through clenched teeth. He'd definitely have a lot of bruising around his hips, probably fractures too, but if he didn't get up none of that would matter. "We're still going to fight, aren't we?"

"Of course we are. I have to take you to the sea after all." A small smile graced her lips after that remark, matching one Armin was wearing, before she refocused her attention on the oncoming Titans. 'For Eren.'

Armin got into a ready stance as well, his two remaining blades out and ready. They both had their backs to the Titan they had been defending as it finally made its way across the trenches. Scores of Titans began to make to make their way towards them. They would

almost certainly die, but they had won, and they would take down as many of the bastards down with them as possible.

As two of the lead Titans were almost upon them though, a rapidly flying figure flew behind them, before making a rapid 180 turn for another pass, spinning like a top the whole while. Not second later, both monsters fell to the ground dead, leaving a perplexed and surprised Armin and Mikasa. The figure didn't stop though, as five more nearby Titans were cut down before it landed atop the pile of corpses they left behind. The figure's back was turned to them, with no identifying features save the green cloak it wore that contrasted against the evening's orange glow. Emblazoned on it were a pair of blue and white wings: The Wings of Freedom.

'The Survey Corps? What are they... They must've noticed something wrong from outside the Wall.' Mikasa turned to look at the breach and saw a number of soldiers passing through into the city, save one who pulled her horse to admire the Rogue Titan as it stood by the entrance.

"Hey brats, what the hell is going on here," spoke the figure. The figure turned, revealing itself as a tired looking man with a piercing gaze that might have killed one of those Titans he was standing on. Behind him, the wave of Titans that was once approaching him was falling to an even stronger wave of soldiers from the Survey Corps.

"S-sir?" Armin almost squeaked at the intimidating man.

"I counted six soldiers that look like they should still be in training, half of which are running around on the ground like headless chickens from Titans, all the while one Titan is standing at that hole with a giant boulder on its shoulder yet it's not killing us. Explain. Now!" The man was short, both in temper and height as was evidenced when he got down from the corpses in order to confront the two.

"Sir, the district gate into human our territory was breached by the Armored Titan. All available Garrison are holding it and all other

Titans at bay there. It was stalled by this Abnormal Titan. It saved our lives on several occasions as well, before and afterwards. It has shown no malice towards us or kinship towards the Titans, and I think," Armin paused to swallow. Not having seen it himself, this soldier probably won't believe him, but he had to say it. "We think there's a human inside it, controlling it."

He just stared at them impassively. Neither Armin nor Mikasa could tell whether he thought they were suffering from stress induced insanity, but they were leaning towards it. To those who hadn't seen what they saw, a human controlling a Titan was still an insanely incredulous idea.

As they waited for his response, the last of the Survey Corps soldiers passed through the breach. Before any Titans could begin to come through again, the Rogue Titan threw the boulder into the gap, sealing it off from any further incursion. It then leaned against the rock, steaming from exertion, while the figure that was on the horse flew upwards to face it.

"We'll keep an eye on it. If it pulls anything though, we won't hesitate to put it down, understood?" They nodded. "Right now, you," looking pointedly at Armin, "need to leave and get your gear sorted out." He turned to Mikasa. "Can you get him up the Wall?"

"Yes sir."

"Good, then get going. We'll need every able bodied soldier available to clean this mess up." He turned and fired his gear towards the boulder, near the female soldier.

"Come on Armin, let's go." Mikasa crouched to allow him onto her back. Once he got on, she fired her cables and made their way away from the battle.

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From a top the Wall, they could see that things were slowly turning in favor of humanity. With the breach sealed, and the Survey Corps,

the number of Titans could be slowly whittled down. As they made their way back to the main Wall, they were met by Connie, Sasha, and Bertholdt, thankfully none of whom were worse for wear.

When questioned on where Ymir went, they said she went into a building with a couple of soldiers, only to come out with Christa in a stretcher held by them and Ymir holding the small girl's hand. None of them knew where Jean and Marco were, save that Connie saw the latter carrying the former away on his gear with a lot of blood on both of them.

A trial by fire for sure, but as far as they could see, they all made it out okay. Not only were they okay though, but they had won. Humanity had, for the first time, defeated the Titans.

Or had they?

Far off in the distance, near the second breach, the sound of thunder accompanied a lightning bolt as it struck the ground. There, materializing out of nowhere was another Titan. It was different from the rest, due in part to its lack of skin in most places, along with a more muscular and noticeably female build. It took a moment to orient itself before it threw back its head and released a high pitched roar. Not a minute later, the Armored Titan ran through the breach and rain of cannon fire beyond it. As it came close to this Female Type, it slowed down to face it. From this distance none of them could see what was going on between the two seemingly intelligent monsters, save for a pair of nods.

Then they began running again; towards the entrance to Trost.

Towards the Rogue Titan.

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AN: Jesus fucking Christ, that was a lot of writing. Over 7000 words here and I'm only starting the Author's Note. I apologize for the delay, as I've told a number of you that reviewed that I would update by such and such weekend and that didn't happen. It was a mix of



college, internet derp, and an overactive muse that's responsible for that. If I listened to my muse, I'd still be writing this chapter so we could get outside Wall Rose at the beginning of the next, but I don't want to keep you guys waiting too long, so here you go. As you all can see, Freckled Jesus lives! But Jean, well you read what happened to him. And who knows how bad Christa's condition is. Oh yeah, that's right, I do! Mwahahaha! How will this change our group's dynamics? Well, you'll see. Maybe. Don't think no one's going to die though. This is still Attack on Titan. I just decided that killing someone here would be bad form. I want to draw out your suffering. I hope you guys don't hate me for another sorta cliffy, but is it really that bad? Nah. Anyway, expect the next update in about the same time period, because I have to read and write a paper on Pride and Prejudice. So much fun (not). So yeah, I hope everyone enjoyed the chapter. If you did, let me know in the reviews; if you don't or if there are issues that you found that I missed, please let me know in a critique review; if you're just angry with what went on here, leave a flame review so I can turn it into an HE round to shoot at a Titan. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to make Mikasa and Ymir belated birthday cakes. Later.

## Chapter 3

A.N. Oi Reiner, Annie, where the fuck are you guys? We're about to start the chapter and you two need to be shifted now! \*sounds of explosions and crumbling stone in the distance\* Damn smart-asses shifting inside the castle. Definitely docking their pay for that. \*sigh\* Hello everyone, and welcome to the next chapter of The Rogue Titan. For those of you who read the most recent two chapters of the manga, you'll know that we were hit with quite the doozy by Isayama; we got some potentially dark and juicy history on one of our lovable midgets, another one's in trouble with our favorite idiot, and some would say that we finally have answers as to what the fuck is going on. I happen to be amongst those some, and the theories that have arisen are beautiful. So beautiful in fact that I have a much clearer idea of what Eren is going to get up to outside the Walls, as well as what everyone else will be doing inside them. Some may love it, some may hate, but for now just sit back and enjoy the chapter. Before you do, I want to address something here. In the reviews some people were mentioning how they were seeing EreAni in the last chapter. I wasn't planning anything regarding that originally, since the challenge and my heart are set on MikEren, but bringing it up now makes me want to have some fun. Heh, hehe, hahaha, MWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! \*coughs hard\* Excuse me, I just channeled my evil dark lord plot twist for a minute there. One last thing before we start, I just want to wish a happy birthday to Jean, Eren, and Annie. Now that that's done with, I present to you Chapter 3 of The Rogue Titan.

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"Fucking deviants," Levi muttered as he watched the rapidly approaching monsters. He observed a soldier aim for the female looking Titan, but rather than falling after she struck it, the Titan just kept running. Even from that distance he was at he could just see that the soldier's blades were broken. Before she could make another pass, the Female Titan swiftly turned, grabbed her cables,

and swung her into another soldier, smashing them both into the side of a building.

Unlike its fellow Titan, the Armored Titan just kept running. Living up to its name, the soldiers' blades could not pierce through its neck, or any other part of its body. It just continued to charge forward, ignoring the Survey Corps soldiers as nothing but pests.

Below him, the Titan that had just sealed the breach in Wall Rose began to decay. From the corner of his eye he noticed the nape splitting open revealing something that normally shouldn't be there.

"Hanji, get whatever's in that Titan and get to the top of the Wall. It's probably what those brats were talking about earlier, and I have a feeling those Titans want this one; let's make sure they don't get it." Levi readied himself to launch into the fray. "Eld!"

"Yes Lance Corporal." Said soldier landed in a crouch next to Levi, facing away from the battle.

"Help Hanji. I'll deal with these ugly bastards." And he was off.

"Eld, grab this arm and pull. I need to cut the muscle holding this in place." Hanji was forearms deep in the superheated flesh as she pulled out what appeared to be a limb... covered in the soldier's jacket sleeve?

"Yes squad leader," Eld responded affirmatively, following her commands as she drew one of her blades. Quickly yet carefully she sliced through flesh ensnaring what looked like a human body wearing a soldier's uniform and gear. "Who the hell is this?"

"No idea," she replied, cutting another chunk of flesh clinging to the individual. "If he's on our side as we suspect though, he could be a vital ally in the war." A grin cracked across her face as she continued, "and as my new research subject. Oh imagine what I could learn from experimenting with him"

Eld shivered; Hanji's creepy scientist persona was showing again. Everyone in the Corps agreed that she seemed a bit too into her work at times, but no one could deny the results. They've definitely saved lives on a number of occasions. Who knows what she'd learn from this "subject".

"There's that should be the last bit." Hanji stepped back from her handiwork to look up the Wall. "Got him?"

"Yes." Eld slung the target under his right arm, adjusting his weight so he could still use both grips.

"Good, follow me then." Pivoting towards the wall Hanji leaned back and fired the cables upwards, Eld coming up not far behind.

---

'Well this is shit,' was the thought running through Levi's mind.

Moving swiftly towards the oncoming Titans, Levi took aim at the trailing Female Titan rather than the Armored Titan ahead of it. It looked as though this was intentional, that the Armored Titan was taking the hits for the more exposed one, almost as though this was planned.

Releasing some gas, he flew over a swipe from the Armored Titan and hit the ground running on the roof of an adjacent building. Approaching the Female Titan, he noticed two other soldiers flying past him close to the ground. They were probably aiming for the tendons in the Female Titan's legs.

He wasn't the only one that noticed though. As the two soldiers approached, the Female Titan dropped into a crouch and swung its leg out in a roundhouse kick. The first soldier managed to just skim over the appendage, but second was too slow. Caught against the monster's shin, he was smashed into an adjacent building, crushed under the rubble.

Pulling its leg out, one could see the steam emanating from the lower part of the titan's leg as it healed.

"You fucker, I'll kill you!" shouted the surviving soldier as he dug his hooks into its back. Flying upwards he was about to take a direct shot at the neck when he found himself in the grip of the monster. It moved him in front of it, staring the soldier down as it began to apply more pressure to its grip.

That's when Levi jumped in, slicing through the fingers in a violent spiral of wires and blades. He didn't stop after the soldier dropped to the ground though. Instead, he continued up the arm to the shoulder, avoiding a swipe by its other hand, and came to the neck. As he reached the nape though, something clear formed out of the flesh, shattering his blades.

Momentum carried him away before the Female Titan could do anything else. He landed not far from where that other soldier had moved to along the roofs.

"You okay?" Levi queried the man as he replaced his shattered blades. He looked shaken, probably new from the 103rd, maybe 102nd training corps, but otherwise unharmed.

"Y-yeah, I-I'm fine. It got-"

"I saw," Levi cut him off. "Don't lose focus."

"Right," the soldier reluctantly agreed.

The titan turned to face them, staring them down on their rooftop perch. Levi could see it in its eyes: it was thinking.

The kid was going to die. Run away or attack, that monster was going to kill the kid first before going after him. Levi hated knowing this, but years fighting the Titans have honed this sense of his, even against Deviants such as this one.

"Kid, aim for the muscles at the top of the left arm, I'll get the right. Keep it occupied while I take it down. Got it?"

"Yes Lance Corporal."

Thing with lives like the kid's is not fighting against the facts, but making the best of them for the sake of the mission; it made him sick just thinking about it, but it was also an unfortunate reality.

Cables launched and fans spinning, they both flew towards the Titan, which had yet to move a muscle from its staring contest with them. Levi's blades struck true as he sliced the muscle that'd lift the right arm. Releasing his cables, he turned to fire them into the back of the beast, only to be greeted by the site of the poor kid's legs kicking from the mouth of the Female Titan. A second later, they fell to the ground, followed by the bleeding, screaming torso that it spit out.

Rather than trying again at the neck, Levi slackened the wires and shifted his weight to fly by the left leg. When he came close though, he released more gas and started retracting his wires, sending him in an upwards arc in front of the Female Titan while avoiding a swipe by the left arm.

Blades at the ready, Levi struck at the flesh of the shoulder, only for that same crystal stuff to form and shatter his blades.

'Shit,' was all he could think before his upwards momentum was suddenly halted. After getting jerked downwards by gravity, he found himself suspended in front of the Female Titan with about five meters of wire between him and its offending hand. There wasn't much less distance between him and any other part of it.

'Damn bitch's a genius compared to the rest.' He scowled at the Titan, trying to think of a way to slice it up and get to its companion.

He didn't have more than a second to do so as he soon found his world spinning.

'Fucker's playing with me.' He tried to release some gas to slow the spin, but he continued to pick up speed. At the rate this was going on, his head would snap right off his body. 'Fuck it, this is the only way.'

Grabbing one blade from his gear with both hands, Levi tried to slide it behind the straps holding it in place. Despite the disorienting movement of being spun, he managed to slice through the straps fairly easily, albeit with gashes along the insides of his hands.

With half the gear gone, Levi found himself off balance, tumbling a bit in his spinning yet still managing to hold onto the blade. It was harder to slip the blade between the straps this time, and the fact that the gear he cut away was still spinning and managed to smash into right arm did not help, yet he managed get it through and began cutting.

Just as he felt the straps give way he felt himself flying. He was at least 30 meters in the air and was rapidly approaching a cluster of buildings.

Thinking fast, Levi dropped the blade and grabbed the hand guard for his remaining gear. The slickness of the blood on his hand made it hard to grasp, but he managed to get a grip and pull the trigger. Chance happened that the gear still worked; he managed to land his remaining hook into one of the anchor towers in the district and change course from plowing into a wall. Rather, he plowed along the roofs as the weakened straps gave way and sent him skidding along the rooftops.

'Damn... That... Hurt...' was his only thought as he blacked out, the feeling of warm oozing liquid trickling down his face and the sounds of heavy footsteps and shouting filling his ears before everything went black.

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Annie didn't even put much thought into what she had just done. She killed those that got in her way and now she was running towards

Eren's Titan corpse again. Reiner was doing a good job grabbing all the soldiers' attention, being the one responsible for so many deaths five years back.

Her? She could fly by relatively undetected, at least until that midget attacked. He was dealt with now though, so no issue there.

She'd passed him about a kilometer back, where he was dealing with at least half a dozen soldiers before three broke off to pursue her. One now found herself flung against the interior of the Wall, the second had his head crushed, and the third was unlucky enough to be jumped by a Titan hiding in an alleyway.

She almost pitied them. They didn't know better. Still, if they just let her complete her mission so much pain and suffering could be saved. At least that's what she told herself.

Less than 500 meters away she could see two figures on top of Eren's corpse, one holding onto what she assumed was his body under its arms. They were going to scale the Walls. If they made it to the top, well she'd just have to make sure Eren didn't follow.

Fifty meters from them as they began to climb, she leapt onto the boulder, then jumped from there, opening her mouth and...

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Hanji peered below to see what that thudding was coming from. She was greeted the maw of Titan surrounding Eld and the Titan boy. Before she could even shout a word of warning, Eld's head and left arm were removed from the rest of his body, blood spraying everywhere and a look of horror and pain painting his face as it fell towards the earth.

The Titan landed and turned, running deeper into the district. In shock, Hanji missed the Armored Titan breaking away from the soldiers it was engaging in order to follow that thing that took what could've been humanity's ace in a whole: a human that could fight as a Titan.



If it was a Titan that could become a human though, that could be bad, but that wasn't a thought in Hanji's mind at the moment.

What was on her mind was the fact that one of Levi's handpicked, and therefore closest, soldiers was no longer with them. Even the Elite fell at the hands of the Titans.

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Eren was barely conscious when he was pulled from the corpse of his Titan form. He was too weak to move or even speak though, so he just let the soldiers pull him out. It didn't sound like they wanted to hurt him at first, but he couldn't understand anything until one was talking about research and experimenting, which worried him a bit.

He felt himself being freed from the flesh, followed by the sensation of air flowing over his body. Then he was warm again, albeit also wet this time. He was moving again too.

When he had fully come to his sense he immediately recognized his surroundings. He was in here once before, or at least someplace similar: inside a Titan's maw.

He wasn't being swallowed though, which gave him pause despite his initial reaction of bringing his hand to his mouth. What was going on? Why wasn't he eaten yet? Was this one of those Titan people like the girl that confronted him? Or maybe it was a friendly one, like him?

His thoughts gave way when he saw a booted leg that didn't belong to him. Someone else was in here with him.

"Hey, you there, can you hear me?"

No response.

"Sir, why are we inside a Titan's mouth?"

Still no response.

"Hey, why are you keeping quiet? This isn't the time to sit around and do nothing." Despite his exhaustion, he pulled himself towards the man, using the gaps between the Titan's teeth as handles until he reached the leg. He grabbed the appendage, tugging at it in order to rouse the what-he-now-recognized-as-a soldier. Pushing up the Titan's tongue, which moved surprisingly easily, he was moved to slap the man's face to wake him up.

To his horror, his hand only swiped at empty air, as the man's head was missing, along with his left arm. He fell backwards in horror, hiding further in the mouth, if nothing else then to remove himself from that grim reminder of what being a soldier meant; more specifically, a member of the Survey Corps, the symbol of which was emblazoned on the man's cloak: death was a near certainty for all but few. Even his idolization of them didn't hide that fact, as there were few familiar faces between expedition parades.

He wasn't a soldier though, at least not anymore. No way could a monster like him ever be a soldier. A warrior though, one who fought for his cause of his own volition, with his own strength and courage, that fit him.

He would become humanity's warrior, protecting that which he could never be part of again. First though, he had to get-

Out? Eren suddenly found himself no longer inside the mouth of the Titan, but on the roof of the Tower. Not three meters away was his pack that he had abandoned no more than two hours ago.

Turning around he came face to skinless face with what looked like a Female Titan. It stared at him for the longest minute he'd felt since the day he tried to stay balanced in the trainee harnesses. After the minute was over it climbed down from the tower and ran off, away from both breaches. He watched it go until it disappeared behind some taller buildings.

'It brought me here. Why? And how'd it know to bring me here?' That Titan had captured him, only to release him back where he started.

Maybe there were good things like him?

His gaze was pulled to the dead Survey Corpsman's body.

'Then again, if it was good, it wouldn't have killed that man to get me. Unless he was evil; but the military existed to protect humanity, why-'

He paused, a look of realization dawning on his face.

'That's right, I'm not human. I'm a monster.' He sighed and sat down. Here he was, human in appearance, action, and mind; yet with one action he could become one of those things that trapped humanity behind the Walls. So what if he could control it; if it looks like a Titan, moves like a Titan, and fights like a Titan, its a Titan and a target for the military. He was a gray in what was clearly a black and white conflict.

He had to get outside the Walls, now more than before for the military knew what he looked like. Granted, he was "eaten" by that Female Titan in Titan infested territory, so it wouldn't be an active search, but as the district was cleared out he could be spotted and then who knows what would happen to him.

'Probably a bunch of research experiments like that one soldier suggested, if I'm not executed right off the bat.'

Never in his quest to exterminate the Titans did Eren imagine he'd become one. Oh how fate had a cruel sense of humor.

Nevertheless, he would exterminate the Titans, until his dying breath he wouldn't stop. At that moment though, he really needed to rest. It wouldn't help him if he lost his balance fleeing outside the Walls and landed in another Titan's mouth. He wasn't going to push his luck like that. Dusk was soon approaching as well. Leaving after dark would probably be for the best.

And so Eren waited.

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Annie made haste into one of the buildings near her fallen corpse. Reiner may have been covering her, but that wouldn't guarantee a stray soldier or two following after her. Ducking behind the counter of what must've been a flower shop that morning, judging by the scattered plants and petals, she waited.

Everything had worked out for them, at least for the most part. Eren was free from the military and would undoubtedly leave the Walls; everyone thought he was dead, including Mikasa, which would save them the trouble of a search party looking for him; and she, Reiner, and Bertholdt were in the top ten in their squad, leaving them to join the Military Police and put them above suspicion of their current actions. After all, no one in that division had their hands clean; if they were suspected of doing something illegal by one of their comrades there, they'd ignore it lest they risk their own skins getting in trouble.

Unfortunately, the breach in the Wall was sealed, but in a weird bit of compensation, Eren still didn't know who they were. He knows that the Armored and Colossal Titan are shifters, and that they have at least one other comrade with in the Walls, but he had given no indication that he knew that they were them. Hell, he didn't even know if her Titan form was with them. At least he probably didn't.

Then again, after all their training together, she had learned if there was one thing you shouldn't do, it's to underestimate Eren Jaeger.

She grinned. Of all the people to be the coordinate, it had to be Jaeger. If things had played out even slightly different their mission might have been so much harder, but thankfully he was awake when he first emerged, and Kirschstein managed to scare him off.

After two long, monotonous hours, filled only with thoughts of their success with regards to Jaeger and the destruction of plant material which she scattered along the floor, she finally felt and heard the fast approach of a pair of heavy footsteps. Stepping out from behind the counter, she approached the door to see Reiner's Titan form kneeling on the ground as it pulled at the armor guarding his neck.

As the plates came free, the body slumped forward to the ground steaming, and out of the now exposed neck was Reiner.

"Took you long enough Reiner." She crossed her arms as she stood in the door way.

"Well losing those soldiers isn't really easy when you're 15 meters of muscle and handsome," he boasted as he jumped down from his Titan form. Annie was not amused. She just turned and went back inside. "So what now?" he queried as he followed her in.

"You know what now." She gave him a look basically challenging him to make her say it. He lost.

"I wait here, playing the damsel in distress, while you go off as the dashing prince that will bring the military here to save my sorry ass."

"For better words, yes. I'll be on the roof, don't get yourself killed before we're rescued." She exited the building and pulled herself up to the roof using her gear. Before she was out of earshot, she heard Reiner mutter a 'yes mom'. Snarky bastard.

And so Annie passed the night watching out for the soldiers that would come save them. In the distance she could hear the sounds of the cannons firing at the Titans, probably taking them out by the dozens now that the sun was down. At one point she saw a figure flying across the district. She could barely make it out in the dark, but rather than draw any attention to herself, she watched it. Sure enough, it went straight for the District Wall, away from both breaches. She saw it fly over before disappearing on the other side of the Wall.

'I'll be seeing you soon, Jaeger.'

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A.N.: Well then, after almost two months I finally updated. Woohoo. Not a lot of Mikasa and the non-Titan 104th, but that'll come next chapter (I hope). Yes, Levi got smashed up, yes Eld is dead; the

former because I felt like it, the latter because I have plans as of the moment I'm writing this sentence because that's how I operate. I do have a plan of sorts though, so don't worry about this being a plot-less mess (unless I forget, then be very worried). Yes, I know the whole idea behind SnK I that there is too much gray in the world for thing to be black and white, that was a bit of irony on my part there, just so you all know. Sorry its not as long as last chapter, but I know you guys were dying for an update, so yeah, here it is. Also, if any of you are upset about hinted EreAni here, blame those who said they saw it. Their interpretations unlocked the evil writer inside me who has been caged for quite some time. Currently he is on the loose, so expect more evil until I recapture him. Aha, there he is right now. \*spots evil looking self, popping out of the brush\* Gotcha. \*pulls out a giant-ass net and chases him\* I'll see you guys next chapter if finals don't kill me first. Bye.

## Chapter 4

A.N. \*random soldier 1\* Looks like its all clear sir. \*random soldier 2\* Yeah, no Titans in sight. \*Spartan Ninja\* Good, you two are dismissed. \*turns towards the audience\* Hello everyone and welcome to the fourth chapter of The Rogue Titan. Sorry for the mess, but the cleanup operation in Trost is still underway. For those of us who have read chapter 57 and 58 of the manga, you know that some serious shit has gone down now. If you haven't read them yet I will only say two things then: Commander Hanji Zoe and Anti-Human 3D Maneuver Gear. So much good stuff, some of which will come into play down the road a bit, but those two things are all I will say without spoiling too much. Also, who has watched the Attack on Titan dub on Adult Swim? I have and I love it, though they did screw up some words and lines (omnidirectional maneuver gear? No, it's 3DMG) \*sigh\* Anywho I want to wish a happy birthday to two more of the 104th favorites, Bald Shorty and Freckled Jesus. Now, with regards to the story, this chapter is going to cover the aftermath of Trost, more specifically-

\*random soldier 1\* We were wrong sir! Titans are still in the District.  
\*A 5 meter Titan can be seen chasing him\*

\*sigh\* \*Spartan Ninja\* Looks like I still have some work to do. Just read the chapter and you'll see what's going on. Just be warned, it's gonna be a bit heavy; I don't have firsthand experience with some of this stuff so I'm sorry if I get it wrong or offend anyone. Now get reading.

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Year 850, Day 4 after the Breach of Trost District

"You can't go in there right now. The patients need their rest, Doctor's orders"

"I don't give a flying fuck about doctor's orders; I finally get a break from cleaning up the mess out there, I am going in to see Christa!"

Marco and Armin peeked around the corner to see an aggravated Ymir trying, and failing, to push her way past a fairly stocky female nurse.

"Ma'am, I appreciate your work out there, but orders are orders. If you refuse to leave I will have to forcibly remove you." She crossed her arms, her strained pleasant face forming a frown.

"I'd like to see you try." Ymir made to dive by the nurse's side through the doorway. Rather than getting through, Ymir found herself tightly slung under the nurse's arm. "Hey, let me go!" Ymir shouted while she struggled in the nurse's iron hold.

Marco decided this would be the best time to intervene, before Ymir did something that even she would regret. "Ymir, there you are. You shouldn't... You shouldn't run ahead of me like that." He leaned forward, resting his hands on his knees as he breathed heavily, as though he had just been running. Getting what Marco was doing, Armin followed suit,

Shifting Ymir for emphasis, the nurse asked "This your friend here?"

Ymir, opposed to being moved about so easily, shouted out. "Hey, watch your-"

"Yeah, she is," Marco cut in bashfully, rubbing the back of his head. "We were ordered to check on the recovery of a couple of our comrades. Ymir here, well she's really concerned about one in specific, and ran ahead of us. I assure you though; we are here for duty first."

"Hm, is this true?" she looked towards at Armin first, who replied with a quick "yes ma'am" before craning her neck to face Ymir, whose head was turned towards her and Marco at an awkward angle. She



just nodded I response. "I'm assuming you have papers with these orders."

'Crap, no I don't. Okay Marco, think fast.' "Yeah, of course I do. They should be right he- oh." The nurse watched as he reached into one of his jacket pockets, only to look surprised when he grabbed nothing. "Maybe it's in my other- no, okay then."

This youngster was definitely making these orders up, but she was enjoying the kid getting flustered. It was the first bit of entertainment she'd gotten during this double shift.

"It must have fallen out your pocket while we were running after Ymir," Armin spoke up.

'Nice save Armin' "That's just great," Marco 'sulked'.

"I can probably find it if I retrace our steps. I shouldn't take long." Armin turned and made to run in the direction he had just come from. In reality he didn't know what he would do to get around this little issue, but he could think of something.

More precisely, he would have thought of something had he not crashed into someone else, eliciting an "oopf" from both individuals. Around them bunches of paper began to float to the floor.

"No, my research!" The other person shouted, bouncing up and frantically grabbing at all the sheets before anything could happen to them.

"I'm so sorry," Armin apologized as he tried to help this person gather their papers back together. As he was doing this, an image on one of the sheets caught his eye: a Titan pinned to the ground with numerous nails, along with number of beams holding the head in place. "What is this?"

"That," the figure started, "is my research."

Armin looked up from the image to see the person he had run into. The first thing he noticed was that they had The Wings of Freedom on their left breast pocket. 'Survey Corps', Armin concluded. Looking up, he noticed the figure had tanned complexion, a pair of glasses, and hair messier than Sasha's after Shadis made her run laps around the camp. "You research Titans?" he asked.

"When I can. It's hard to research something that keeps trying to eat you, but with what's happened in Trost there's no shortage of subjects to-" She cut herself off as a pained look threatened to break across her face. She took her papers from Armin and muttered a quick "Excuse me" before rounding the corner.

Following her with her eyes, he saw her walk past Marco, the nurse, and Ymir; who was still held in the nurse's arm; into the room they had been trying to get into.

"Wait, you aren't allowed in there!" The nurse dropped Ymir, who landed flat on her stomach, as she tried to stop the soldier. Instead of grabbing her though, the nurse only grabbed air as the soldier ducked to the side.

"Levi!" The soldier yelled, whatever mood she was just in seeming to have left her voice.

"What do want Shitty Glasses?" Another voice groaned out.

"I'm so sorry for the disturbance sir; I'll remove her right away." The nurse's words were followed by a loud thud.

"It's fine. Shitty Glasses here won't go anywhere unless she wants to. At least she'll liven things up in here."

"But-"

"Might as well let those whining brats in too; they'll make less noise that way. Maybe then everyone else'll be able to get some rest."

The nurse's reply was a simple huff as she passed through the doorway and stood to the side, a frown on her face as she cocked her head at the door. Ymir got the message immediately and scrambled to her feet. Marco looked back at Armin, before shrugging his shoulders and followed after their crass comrade.

Inside were two rows of eight cots each, all occupied. Most of the occupants were asleep, tucked under the sheets in a dream world that was hopefully better than the reality they were living.

The aforementioned "Shitty Glasses" was sitting on a stool at the side of the second bed on the right, where she was adamantly, although fairly quietly, talking about her research. The person in the bed, who Marco and Armin assumed to be Levi, just sat there listening, though from Armin's perspective his eyes seemed a bit glazed over. As he passed his bed, Armin felt a sense of déjà vu and gave the man a second glance. He was without a doubt the same soldier that saved him a week ago in Trost, albeit a bit beaten up. He thought about stopping for a moment to thank him, but thought better of interrupting his friend. Besides, he had his own friends to attend to. Still, that did leave a little question in the back of his mind that he wanted an answer to.

"Hey Marco, do you think that's "the" Levi?" Armin queried quietly as they passed the two

"You mean Humanity's Strongest Soldier?"

"Yeah, I saw him back in Trost during the battle. He saved me and Mikasa with maneuvers I didn't think were possible on the gear."

Marco gave a quick glance back before turning back to Armin. "I don't think so; he looks too short to be "the" Levi."

"Hm." Armin looked back to see Levi glaring daggers right over "Shitty Glasses'" shoulders. He gulped, never feeling more fear for his life than in that moment.

A couple of beds down sat Ymir at Christa's side. The bed's occupant was asleep, so Ymir contented herself with holding the tiny girl's uninjured hand. Looking at his friend, Armin saw that Christa was in a right state. Bandages completely covered the top of her head as well as the right side of her face. A brace surrounded her neck, there was a sling under her chin, probably to hold a broken jaw in place, and a cast completely wrapped left arm resting above the covers. Any other injuries she might have had were hidden under the sheets.

Sensing his presence, Ymir looked up at Armin. Her eyes were brimming with tears. "I couldn't keep her safe." Her voice was barely above a whisper. She blinked and turned her head, trying to hide the tears that began to fall freely. "I couldn't protect her and she almost died!" She was holding back sobs, though Armin could see the guilt eating at her. It was the same he had felt himself not too long ago.

Armin didn't know Ymir that well. He really only knew her through association with Christa despite their completely different personalities. Still, she was a comrade and Armin liked to think she was a friend. And friends helped each other when they needed it.

"But she's here, isn't she?" That grabbed Ymir's attention. "Christa is alive and she will recover."

"Yeah, right, of course she will." Ymir's mood picked up a bit. That big smile she always wore when talking about Christa appeared, though it was more forced than Armin would have liked. "After all, she still has to marry me; can't do that if she dies. Guess I'll just have to do a better job protecting her."

"You shouldn't do that." Ymir's faux happy expression dropped into confusion. "If you think like that, try to fight her battles for her, she won't get stronger. What'll happen if you get separated while fighting the Titans?" Armin let that settle for a minute. Ymir was one of those people you had to be straight with; she would take any sugar coating or beating around the bush as being spineless and weak-willed and would ignore you outright. "Be glad she survived Trost, but

remember she enlisted in the military knowing the risks; you need to let her accept them and expect no better treatment from you than any other comrade. Otherwise she will die." Ymir looked away from Armin and towards her sleeping goddess.

Feeling that there was nothing more that could be said, Armin walked away. As he left her, Ymir thought on what Armin said. 'You're wrong Arlert. If it wasn't for me, she would have died a long time ago. Still, you are right about one thing: she needs to get stronger, especially with what lies beyond the Walls.'

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Jean's bed was the last one on the left, right next to the window which gave him a good view of the street below. Marco was chatting with him, telling Jean that his mother had gotten out perfectly fine, though their house would be in better shape.

"Are you serious? A 12 meter class caved the roof in? Argh!" Jean palmed his face in frustration. "Dammit, no way my mom's going to be able to fix it." He sighed.

"You know I'd be happy to pitch in and help." Marco tried to bring up Jean's mood, but he wasn't having any of it.

"You mean you'd do all the heavy lifting while I sit around due to this damn leg!" He threw his hands down towards the foot of the bed. The sheets were kicked off and one could see that his right leg ended at knee joint with just a tiny bit of stub covered up in wrappings.

"Calm down Jean. You're alive, you should focus on that rather than, well..."

"I can't Marco! I was sixth in our class; I was finally going to join the Military Police and move into the interior! We were going to be living the good life. Now I'd be lucky for even the Survey Corps to take me. Hell, I won't even be able to take up farming out in the wastelands." He

closed his eyes and threw himself back down on the bed, as though he had given up on everything.

They all knew what Jean meant; there was so exaggeration in what he had said. With the food and supply shortage following Wall Maria fell five years ago, every able bodied person had to pull their weight for the survival of humanity. This led to a change of public sentiment towards those that couldn't. While it was never explicitly said by anyone in the general populace, they had both seen from how people would look at elderly and permanently crippled person; their gazes conveying the idea that those individuals were burdens on humanity. Not only that though, but in the intervening years between the fall of Wall Maria and joining the trainee squad, Armin learned firsthand how cruel humans could be.

One of the days before enlisting, he had been making his way back to Eren and Mikasa with their daily rations. On the way, he passed a man sleeping in an alley way. His clothes were only slightly worn, but looking down he could see that one of his legs had clearly been broken and healed the wrong way; it appeared to him that the man had been left there. Feeling that the man was going to need it more, Armin left his ration of bread with him before heading back to the others. When he had returned they questioned what happened to his food, to which he replied he had been a klutz and dropped it into a ditch while rushing back. The next day he stopped by the same alley, intending to see the man was alright, but he was no longer there. What were there were drag marks that led deeper into the alley and faint strangled moans of pain echoing from the distance.

Instances like that weren't a rarity in the southern parts of Wall Rose, what with the majority of refugees having arrived through Trost's gate and settling in the surrounding areas; it wasn't the last time Armin observed such a horrid altercation. Jean and Marco weren't naïve to this either, though being the furthest north from Trost, Marco was unaware of exactly how bad it was.

Marco broke the silence. "I won't let anything happen to you Jean. I owe you that much at the very least." He really did. Back in Trost had

Jean not roused him and the rest of their comrades to make a break for the Tower, they would have all probably died in the district.

Jean reopened his eyes and looked at Marco. He really shouldn't take Marco for granted; he was committed to his friends and felt himself lucky that Marco considered him his closest friend; he wouldn't know what he would've done had things in Trost gone down differently. "Thanks Marco," he said genuinely. "So, does that mean we're still going to the interior together?"

Marco's eyes widened a bit, then quickly glanced to Armin before looking back at Jean, then back to Armin. Armin shook his head then craned it towards Jean, indicating that he should explain.

"We've been talking about that actually."

"Who's we," Jean questioned. He didn't like where this was going.

"Me, Mikasa, Sasha, Connie, and Armin. We've been talking about placement in the little free time we've had, since it's probably going to occur as soon as we finish cleaning up Trost. Connie and Sasha weren't decided, shaken up with everything that happened in there. I suggested that we should all join the Military Police, since the four of us are in the top ten. Armin though..." he trailed.

"I'm joining the Survey Corps." He affirmed.

"What! Are you serious Armin?" Jean almost shouted, barely aware that there were still other people trying to rest right now. Armin nodded. "Why? Eren's dead, there's no reason to follow the dreams of a dead man."

"It's not for Eren," he intoned coolly.

This was a surprise for Jean; since he knew Armin, Eren, and Mikasa, it always seemed as wherever the hot head went, the other two would follow in order to keep him from getting into too much trouble. He would have figured that with Armin being as smart as he

was, he'd logically want to take the safest route possible and join the Garrison.

"Ever since I was a kid I dreamed of the outside world. My parents had several books dating back from before the Titans, describing lands of ice and pools of fire, and a giant lake filled with salt water known as the sea. I want to see it all, I want everyone to be able to see it all, just like my parents are. I can only do that if I go beyond the Walls with the Survey Corps." There was a fire in Armin's eyes that reminded both Marco and Jean of his friend. Maybe the two weren't as different as they thought.

"And Mikasa?"

"She's said she's coming with me. Before training I used to tell her and Eren those stories all the time; we were going to go out and see the world together. We still are. That's why we're joining the Survey Corps."

"So, you're planning on joining us, eh?" The three boys turned to see that lady Armin had run into closing the last meter between her and Jean's bed, her somber mood from before having disappeared. "The outside world is an amazing place; I can tell you that first hand, though I've never seen that sea you mentioned." The boys just stared at her, still a bit perplexed at her sudden appearance by them. "Oh, how rude of me, I didn't even introduce myself. My name's Hanji Zoe, I'm the Head Scientist and Researcher of the Survey Corps."

"I'm Marco Bodt," he smiled out.

"Jean Kirschstein," he said flatly.

"Amin Arlert," he stated with a tinge of interest.

"So I heard you and your friends are going to join the Survey Corps.

"Friend actually; our other friend..." Armin glanced down to the side.



"I understand. Trost was a disaster." Her tone was solemn, before pepping up a little as she turned to Marco and Jean. "And you two? I didn't catch where you two are going."

"We're really not sure, heh." Marco rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "We were thinking about joining the Military Police, being in the top ten and all."

"Really, top ten? I heard this training squad is the best since the 95th; for you two of you to make it there, well is just a shame that talent won't be joining us."

"I'm not going to be joining anything like this," Jean muttered bitterly to the side.

"Oh and why's that?" Apparently this Hanji lady was a very good listener.

Jean sighed. He had a feeling this weirdo wasn't going to leave unless he gave her what she wanted, so with great reluctance he pulled his sheet to the side once again.

"Ah." She crouched a bit, her face almost level with Jean's stump staring at it.

And then she poked it.

"Gah! What the hell are you doing?" He yelled as he flinched back. He held his thigh in his arm, away from who he was starting to think was a crazy lady.

"I was testing to see if you still had feeling there," was Hanji's nonchalant reply, as though he had just asked her about the weather.

"Of course I still have feeling there, it fucking hurts!"

"I see... Wiggle it."

"What?"

"I said wiggle it; move your stump. I want to see its range of motion."

"I don't think that's a good-" Marco tried to cut in.

"The hell should I?" Jean shouted.

"Oi brats, shut up and do what the lady says. We're trying to sleep here!" This came from the lady in the bed diagonal to Jean's, frustrated at the ruckus the kid was causing.

Hanji gave Jean an expectant look; he was right with his earlier assumption, she was definitely stubborn. He stared her down for what felt like an hour, though it was probably only two minutes, before she moved to poke it again.

"Alright, alright, I'll do it, just don't poke it again." He began moving what remained of his lower leg; it hurt, but not as much as it would if that crazy lady kept poking it.

"Fascinating. You still have most of your movement there. If only you had..." She trailed off, scratching her chin deep in thought.

"Is it just me, or has this lady fallen of a horse one too many times?" Jean whispered aside to Marco.

"That's not very nice Jean." He felt a bit scandalized by his friend's words.

"I'm just saying she just doesn't seem entirely-"

"Alright!" Slamming her fist into her palm regained the three lads' attention. "Jean, was it?" He nodded. "I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse."

Jean was skeptical, raising an eyebrow at the scientist's statement. "Well let's hear it. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon any way."

"Well if you accept, you just might." Now Jean was interested, Marco and Armin too. "If you give me some time, say two weeks, I can probably construct a replacement leg for you."

"What?"

"No way!"

"How?" Jean, Marco, and Armin exclaimed in order.

"Simple really; he has some leg below the knee that he can move. It wouldn't be perfect, but with a weighted replacement and some practice he should be able to walk and possibly even use the Three-Dimensional Maneuver Gear again."

"What do you get out of this?" Jean wasn't a fool; he doubted that this Hanji person was doing this out of the kindness of her heart. There had to be a catch, especially for something like this.

Her response was almost too chipper for his liking, and after hearing it he was entirely justified. "It's not exactly what I get; it's more what the Survey Corps gets. If I help you walk again, you have to join the Survey Corps."

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Jean lay wide awake in his hospital bed. It was late; all the noise from the citizens outside had long since died down and the only lights he could see coming from the stars in the sky. Armin, Marco, and that Hanji lady had long since left the room. Before Hanji left, she off-handedly mentioned that you needed to have joined a division for some time in order to receive any pay or compensation. That just made him feel his situation was that much more dire.

She had then departed saying that she'd be back the next day for an answer, as she could clearly see he was conflicted.

'Heh, some offer that is. Either I live with no life, or I get a life I won't live for long,' he thought bitterly. 'I wish could go back home, but I

just can't. The money dad sends home isn't what it used to be, and mom needs every bit she can get. I won't let myself be a burden to Marco either. Would it be possible to get an apprenticeship somewhere in the District?' He shook his head, and then began slamming it into his pillow multiple times.

"Hey brat, you're not having a seizure there, are you?" This came from a flat voice somewhere in the room. When Jean didn't reply, a figure rose from one of the beds near the entrance and sighed, then began walking towards him. The footsteps were staggered, one coming quickly after the other, then a long pause, then two quick steps, then a pause. This continued until the figure was at the foot of his bed.

He was a little over a meter and a half tall, black hair cut like his, but longer, and a serious air about him. Both his arms were in splints and slings, as was his nose, and there were wrappings covering his left ear and forehead. This man had obviously taken a beating.

"Kid, you alright?" he asked again.

This time Jean replied. "I'm fine. Just frustrated."

"Hmm," was the figure's elegant response. "Four-eyes get to you?"

"Who, that Hanji lady? Yeah, kind of."

The figure limped over to the side of his bed and sat down on the edge. "What did she do this time?"

"Nothing, not yet at least." With that Jean began explaining to this figure the situation he found himself in, from his dreams as a kid to almost accomplishing them before they were viciously taken with his leg, to the choice he had to make. All the while the figure just sat there, listening.

"Sounds like you have an offer you can't refuse on your hands," he stated neutrally.

"I know, it's just..." He took a deep breath. "I've seen the military parades after Wall Maria fell. Scouts go out, only about half comeback. And for what, what are all those soldiers dying for? When has humanity beaten the Titans in the last 100 years?" Silence reigned before the figure spoke again.

"It's true. As a species we haven't beaten the Titan's once. I have seen too many allies destroyed by those monsters out there. However, that doesn't mean it's all for nothing. There are 56 expeditions worth of knowledge due to the incursions beyond the Walls. Shitty Glasses always goes on about how knowledge helps you fight your enemy, and so far she has been proven to be right." He paused, taking a deep breath, then continued. "I can tell you first hand, if you don't join the military, you will be stuck on the streets indefinitely. As bad as it might seem to live a life in the Corps, I can assure you from experience that it's the best choice you've got."

"The streets that bad, huh?" The figure nodded.

"I'm not going to tell you what to decide. You're an adult, almost a soldier. I've given you my side, now it's up to you to decide." He got up. "Choose wisely." And he began walking back to his bed.

"Wait." The figures gape stopped. "I didn't catch your name."

"Levi."

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"Connie, that hurt," Sasha whined, rubbing her rear.

"Sorry Sasha, I did promise you that back in the Tower," he quipped back, chuckling a bit.

"Of all the things for you to remember," she grumbled.

A ghost of a smirk tugged the corner of Mikasa's lips at their antics. Leave it to those two to make a funny situation out of nothing.

"Hey, Mikasa, you think we're going to be done with clean up today?" Sasha asked, now walking backwards besides Connie.

"Maybe. We have been at it 'round the clock since they gave the all clear yesterday."

"Man, I hope so. Burning the bodies and those balls the Titans coughed up..." Connie cringed and shivered.

"Not to mention the stench. I still can't smell anything after yesterday's work," Sasha replied, grabbing her nose.

"Seriously Sasha, that's what you're complaining about?" Connie asked incredulously.

Mikasa tuned them out, not really comfortable talking about what they've been doing the past few days. They brought up sadder thoughts that she'd been trying to push to the back of her mind.

To say that Trost was a grisly site would be an understatement. Those Titan-mucus-ball things were filled with bits and pieces of their comrades. She has seen the faces of at least a couple of the cadets she knew from training. And having to burn them all, it was unpleasant to say the least.

She grabbed at her neck, trying to pull her ever present scarf over her face for a bit of comfort, only to realize it wasn't there. It was lost in the battle, just like its former owner.

Who knew what happened to him. He could have already been burnt, or lodged in one of those things, or just lying in an alley somewhere, slowly rotting away. As much as she missed, if he wasn't already cremated, she didn't want to see him like that, to remember him like that.

She wanted to remember him as the happy boy she met, the idealist who she survived with, and the man that was ready to take on the world.

She sighed. Armin had told her what happened, how Eren had died saving him. She was glad Armin was safe, but a small part of herself that she buried deep down thought otherwise, wishing Eren had survived instead. Worst part is, she found herself agreeing with it at times.

If it wasn't for Armin though, they may not have been able to stop the Titans from entering Wall Rose. That one Titan, the Rogue Titan, as special as it was, it wouldn't have been of any use without him. For that she was thankful, for humanity would live, and she would be able to remember Eren.

"Excuse me; I'm looking for a Mikasa Ackerman. Would you know where I can find her?" Hearing her name pulled Mikasa back into the present. A short amber eyed, ginger haired woman in a Survey Corps uniform had stopped Connie and Sasha.

She stepped up behind her friends. "I'm Mikasa Ackerman."

"Ah, good, I was afraid I'd have search the district for you. I have a letter for you." The woman removed an envelope from her breast pocket and handed it to Mikasa.

"What is it?" Sasha asked, while Connie tried to grab at the letter. It was pulled away before he could get a hold of it.

"It is a letter for Ms. Ackerman to read at her own discretion," the miffed red-head said, before placing it in Mikasa's hands.

"Thank you," Mikasa said curtly. Who would send her a letter? Only two people came to mind who she thought would send her one, neither of whom were in the Survey Corps. Maybe they just knew the woman and asked for a favor.

"Just following orders. Take care," she said politely before turning and walking away.

After following her with her eyes for a few seconds, Mikasa diverted her attention to the letter in her hands.

"Well, ya gonna open it?" Sasha leaned in from the other side with Connie on Mikasa's other arm. They probably weren't going to go until she opened the letter. She could just flip them and get away to read it, or bribe them with food in Sasha's case, but in all honesty she didn't care if they read it too. It probably wasn't that big of a deal any ways.

Turning the envelope, she saw it was sealed with the seal of the Survey Corps. 'Okay, maybe this is a little bigger than I thought.' Breaking it, she pulled out the letter and read it. Sasha and Connie noticed her eyes go wide in surprise, and pushed themselves over her shoulders to see what had garnered such a reaction from her.

"No way." Connie couldn't believe what he just read.

"Does that say what I think it says?" Sasha trailed.

"Uh-huh," he nodded.

Mikasa just folded the letter again and placed it in her pocket. She had a lot to think about now.

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"So what do we do now?" Reiner asked, resting arms crossed against on one of the alley walls. Bert was sitting next to him against, with Annie leaning on the opposite one. "We're in here; Eren, who we assume is the coordinate, is out there between the Walls; and we need to get him without our absence being noticed."

"We can't all join the Military Police. We'd be too far from the Walls to slip in and out in a reasonable period of time. We'd surely get caught," Annie said matter of factly.

"One of us could join the Survey Corps. It is the only legitimate way to go outside after all," Reiner offered.



"The question then is who goes?" Bertholdt was feeling like a bundle of nerves ready to fray right now. Even though things had gone off without much of a hitch, he felt this time had been a bit too close for comfort, actually knowing people not only within the Walls, but within the military as well.

"I think I should go." Bertholdt looked up to Reiner. "If things go wrong, I have my armor to protect."

'And Bertl?" Annie asked, knowing the two were basically attached at the hip.

"He'll come with me. Can't leave this handsome partner behind, now can I." He patted Bertholdt with a smile, which was awkwardly returned by the tall guy.

Annie rolled her eyes; Reiner really needed to calm down. "And me? I know none of us are as important as the plan, but it's a long run from the interior to Rose."

"250 kilometers," Bertholdt muttered.

"That's just between the exteriors of the Main Walls. That also doesn't take into account obstacles and soldier patrols. If things go wrong, I'd be in the worst position to escape."

"Where are you going with this?" Reiner knew where she was going with this; he just wanted to hear her say it.

With a sigh, Annie pushed off the wall and said, "Where I'm going is that I think I should join the Survey Corps."

"Aside from giving you the better out, how would that help any of us, or the mission as a whole?" Reiner asked with some faux anger. In actuality though he was curious how Annie's line of thought lead her to such a decision.

"I'm the ice cold bitch, remember? I won't be making any friends with the MP's any time soon." Her voice was dry and lacking humor. "On the other hand, you've made friends with everyone in our training squad. It shouldn't be too hard for you to make friends in high places if you go to the Interior. It would be a waste of your people skills to do otherwise. And if things go to hell, your armor can protect you and Bert better than mine."

"Anything else?" That didn't seem like everything she was thinking in that moment.

"I know Eren, as both Annie and the Shifter he met, and better than both of you. You remember all those times he came to me for extra training. I wouldn't say we're friends, but he trusts and respects Annie. He didn't quite seem to hate the Shifter that saved him from the military either. You two however..." She left it at that.

"She does make a sound point Reiner." In all honesty Bertholdt just wanted to get away from the exterior Walls. He took no pleasure in tearing them down, nor did he enjoy knowing his actions resulted in the deaths of some of his friends. If he could accomplish the mission without having to deal with that again he would be very content.

Reiner looked like he wanted to disagree, but he just released a frustrated sigh. "Fine, just make sure you find your boyfriend sooner rather than later."

Her eyes widened before narrowing into a glare directed at him. "You're an ass Reiner." She turned and exited the alley, pulling the kerchief over her face to resume cleaning up.

"Come on Bertl, we should get back to work. Don't want to get arrested for dereliction of duty now would we?" He clasped Bertholdt's hand and pulled him to his feet.

"Should we go after her?"

"Nah, she'll be fine. You know how she is. Besides, she might flip me again if we do."

"Alright then." The two Shifters left the alleyway, returning to the cover that they could not afford to blow at this stage of the game. The coordinate was finally in reach. All they needed to do was grab him.

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Year 850, Day 8 after the Breach of Trost District

The past week had been but a blur to him.

There'd been running, lots of running.

Running and Titans.

Those fucking things just wouldn't leave him alone.

Except at night.

For some reason when night fell, they all began to slow down until they all just stopped. Then when the sun came back up they "turned on" like an oil lamp.

That was something he learned his first week outside Wall Rose. He'd actually learned quite a bit in this time, all of which would hopefully help him survive.

Something else he had learned during his flight was that it wasn't only his Titan form that could regenerate body parts. As he prepared to rest that first night outside Wall Rose, he fumbled with his gear and grabbed onto one of the blades. It cut through the skin and muscle, exposing the bloody red bone beneath.

As he tried to rip off some of his cloak for bandages, he noticed steam rising from his hand. Staring at it, he watched the wounds close on their own. Apparently his human body could regenerate too.

How much it could do that though, well he wasn't going to test that out, though judging on how he recovered earlier that day it seemed he could also regrow limbs.

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, he had learned that if he spent more than three hours in his Titan form, it began to be difficult to get out of it. If stayed in it for the entirety of daylight, it was almost impossible to get out.

Not only that though, but as stayed in the Titan body for longer periods of time, he began to forget. At the same time though, he also began to remember; remember what though was something he couldn't say. The memories left him when he finally got out of the Titan at the end of the second day. Whatever they were though, they left him feeling quite uneasy.

At the time he was curious as to what these memories were, but had since decided against going through that whole ordeal of becoming unstuck again. He was jumped by a 9 meter class just as he freed himself that time. He had unfortunately removed his gear, and was left with only one option to deal with the Titan.

After disposing of the little issue, Eren had exited his Titan form for a second time in less than half an hour, that time much more easily than the last. However, he had felt extremely unwell, and was left stumbling to where his first body had been to grab his pack before slowly making his way to the nearby cottage. He had intentionally stopped near there in order to rest in a reasonably safer area.

He barely managed to get through the door before passing out, but he managed to stay awake long enough to make a beeline to the one bed in the little house. Dropping his pack, he fell asleep the moment he hit the bed and didn't wake up until the morning. He would have slept later had the shaking earth not told him it was time to go. A giant hand breaking through the roof emphasized that message. It really was a shame that the cottage got wrecked as it did; it was really quite nice, definitely a step up from the village just

outside Trost he had stayed in the first night. Survival had demanded it though.

When he bit into his hand at first though, nothing had happened. So he bit it again, and again, and again, before switching to his other hand; nothing. Eren shivered as he remembered the hands that kept making more and more holes in the roof. His mind had been a mess between trying to grab his pack, get out of the collapsing cottage, and deal with the Titans outside.

At one point a beam landed on his leg, trapping him. The hand soon found him, and in that moment his mind closed in on one thought: Fight!

Three Titans dead and two replaced limbs later and he had been on the move again. That experience taught him the second most important thing he needed to know outside the Walls. For some reason, if his thoughts mind was a mess, he can't transform.

As the week continued, he began taking periodic breaks when afforded the chance, wanting to avoid a similar occurrence as what happened the second night and the following morning. This eventually evolved into roughly three hour intervals by the end of the fourth day, judging by the movement of the sun, which he had been keeping to since.

It was halfway through his sixth day in his self-imposed exile he was finally able to stop running.

Before him was a forest filled with giant trees, some easily taller than the Walls. He had heard of this place back when he was a kid, before Shiganshina fell, but never had the opportunity to visit. What were the odds he'd see it now, running blind between the Walls?

After ensuring the surrounding area was safe, he removed his gear from its place under his tongue, putting it on the ground, and disengaged himself from his second Titan body that day. Moving quickly he equipped one of the sets of 3D Maneuver Gear and

launched himself into the trees, safely out of the reach of any Titans. He estimated that the branch he been settled on since was about 35 meters up, with plenty of tree above him if one were to somehow reach him.

Since then he had kept to the forest, allowing himself to fully recover from shifting so many times. He did explore the surrounding area a bit, but only at a safe height in the trees with his gear. There weren't any big Titans as far as he could see, but the tree line was thick and a small abnormal could be much worse than regular 15 meter class.

Finally having a safe place where the Titans wouldn't be able to reach him, Eren was able to think about what he was going to do now that he was safe from the Military and Titans.

'First things first, I need to become stronger. What happened back in Trost, I can deal with regular Titans easily. A swarm of them though, or one of those intelligent ones, and I'm dead, and if I lose focus before transforming... Can't let that happen. I barely avoided death three times that one day alone; I can't afford to press my luck like that anymore, especially if I'm going to exterminate them.'

'I also need to find a way to handle helping the Survey Corps. If I try approach them as a Titan, there's no guarantee they won't try to kill me even if they see me attack other Titans. And if I showed up as a human, there'll be too many questions to contend with. Either they'll find me out, or assume something even worse.'

'And then there's this.' He reached under Mikasa's- his scarf and clenched his hands around the key. Memories of his father, a needle, and pain flashed through his mind. With it all was a command. "Get to the basement Eren!"

'I need to return to Shiganshina.'

He leaned back against the tree trunk and sighed. The fact of what he was doing was settling in. He was going to be living alone out here, the closest thing to human contact being the corpses in the

stomachs of the monsters below. He was finally starting to feel alone.

No, not alone, but definitely lonely. There was that woman who said she was like him. She didn't seem like good news though, especially with how she responded to the Armored Titan showing up.

Then there was that Female Titan. It definitely knew what it was doing with him, setting him back at the Tower. It seemed like it was on his side, like it wanted him to go. It felt very weird thinking that, that a Titan could be on his side, but maybe that one was also like him. It could have even been that woman's Titan form.

That still left him with more questions though. Firstly, why did she let him go if she said it was her mission to capture him? Who were the others she was talking about? Where was this village of Titan Shifters she mentioned? Most importantly though, why did they want him?

He couldn't answer any of those questions.

A cool breeze blew through the evening, chilling the air around Eren. He pulled his scarf up over his face to shield it.

He never imagined he'd get his scarf back; not to say that he ever really wanted to, Mikasa seemed to make better use of it than he ever did. She loved it, wearing it almost every day even during the summers. He could swear he could smell her on it.

"I miss them," he spoke into the fabric. 'I hope they've wizened up; now that I'm gone they won't feel the need to follow me into the Survey Corps. Mikasa can go join the Military Police and Armin with the Garrison. They both deserve the lives they'd afford them.'

He looked up into the distance, back towards where Wall Rose was hidden on the horizon, feeling a weak tug trying to pull him back. On the 8th day of his exile, Eren longed for his home that he could no longer return to.

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Body after body walked past her, forming a sea of persons around her. So many walked by, leading her mind to unpleasant places in regards to her fellow soldiers.

'No, not soldiers; a soldier is willing to fight, is willing to win. These people, they'd rather wait, let death come when it does.' It rubbed her the wrong way, in every wrong way, going against the very way she saw life. If you lose, you die; if you win, you live; but you cannot live unless you fight. As much as she wanted to say something, she maintained her composure, a cool expression on her face. Scanning the area with brief glances, she saw some familiar faces amongst the crowd.

Armin wasn't too far ahead of her, a bit to the right, hidden by the tide of fleeing men and women. Sasha and Connie were a bit farther up and over on her left. She could see Marco out of the corner of her eye with...

'Jean?' Indeed it was Jean, uniform and all, trying to stay balanced on his crutches while holding the steady against the crowd. 'What is he doing here?' She was definitely going to ask him later.

A ways to her left she could see Ymir next to a pretty banged up girl trying to salute from a wheeled chair. The poor girl must've been through hell, especially with her short stature. She had a cast on her right leg, another on her left arm in a sling, a chest cast that happened to show through the spaces between shirt buttons, a neck brace and jaw sling, bandages covering her right ear, a thick eye patch on her right eye, and stitches along her shaved scalp. Despite all these injuries, she could see a fire in her eye, a fire that reminded her of Eren's so much it almost scared her. Almost

What really surprised her though was the woman standing directly on her right.

Annie had stayed.



She was joining the Survey Corps.

That was even more surprising than Reiner leaving with Bertholdt and the Military Police earlier that night.

She knew Annie was initially going to join the Military Police, what could have changed her mind?

It was after all the cowards had left, the men and women pretending they wanted to fight, that the Commander had begun speaking again.

"... Then effective immediately, I welcome you all here as members of the Survey Corps! This is a real salute! Give your heart!" he shouted, giving the Military salute

"Yes sir!" was the resounding reply of everyone remaining; even Jean and that girl were doing their best to return his salute.

"You okay Christa," she heard Ymir ask. The injured girl nodded.

'She's Christa?' Mikasa hadn't seen what happened to her after Trost. All she knew was that she had been taken to a hospital by the Survey Corps with Jean. It wasn't the injuries that surprised her, but that calm timid Christa looked so ready to take on the world, despite clearly needing more time to heal.

"You did well to control your fears. You are all brave soldiers. You have my heartfelt respect." With that the Commander bowed his head and dismissed them.

It was official.

They were members of the Survey Corps.

And she, well she was still surprised at what she was now.

Mikasa felt a tug on her person pull her attention towards the Wall, beyond which her future lied. Eight days after days after losing her

most precious person, Mikasa longed for her home that would never return.

---

A.N. Well, I think that's long enough, wouldn't you agree? Over 8,500 words, this is the longest chapter in the story so far. I hope you've all enjoyed it, especially Jean, Levi, and Christa fans. \*chuckles darkly\* Now the story finally begins to change. With Eren gone, and Annie switching places with Reiner and Bertl, what's going to happen in the Survey Corps now? How will those two giants of men deal with being in the MP's? What is Mikasa that's different from her fellow cadets? And what will Eren get up to now that he's safe and clear of the Walls? Well you'll find out eventually. In the mean time I'll just watch the fallout from here. I hope you enjoyed the tiny bit of fluff I put in, even though at the same time it doubles as angst. With that I say adieu. \*he flies off into the distance, off of the corpse of the 5 meter class that had been chasing his soldiers earlier\*

## Chapter 5

A.N.: Hey everyone, how's it hanging? \*swings on his gear from a branch up above\* Who's ready for chapter five? \*swings back and flips upside down and raises/lowers a hand\* I am. \*flips back up\* I talked to a couple of you to get some valuable insight on what to do in regards to several characters. \*he strikes a pensive pose, fingers scratching at his chin\* I will admit I was surprised that I didn't get much of a reaction for Christa or Jean's injuries, but maybe I'll get those later this chapter. Any who, this chapter will continue doing as last chapter did in bridging the events in Trost with what I want to focus the next arc of the story on. What that is is still a vague idea that isn't fully formed, but I will get us there. There are, and Whovians will get this reference, fixed points in plot and time that cannot be changed, serving as anchors that will hold everything else together. Now on with the chapter. \*he makes an onwards gesture, but stays hanging in place\* Can someone get me some gas first?

---

Year 850, Day 8 after the Breach of Trost District, 1st Night Post-Graduation

'It's so cold,' Mikasa thought, pushing herself up from her bed. Curfew had passed a while ago, but she was still lying there awake, same as every night for the past week. She instinctually grabbed at her neck, trying to draw some comfort from Eren's scarf, only to be reminded it wasn't there anymore. Without it, everything felt cold, same as that one night six years ago.

She slipped out of bed, ignoring the chill of the cold stone against her feet, and made her way out of the barracks. 'Maybe there's a fire still going somewhere,' she thought, though any real hope was no existent. With the night as dark as it was at this point, anyone that wasn't asleep would definitely be close to nodding off; any fire they'd be tending would be out by now. She wasn't going to sleep anytime soon though, so she began to wander.

If anyone saw her now, they would have sworn they saw a ghost. The blanket she held around her shoulders fell down to her feet, white as her shirt and skin. It fluttered in the breeze, giving her an ethereal, ghost-like look. Anyone still awake would have thought her for one of their deceased comrades, returned from the grave.

This wasn't that far from the truth. While her body kept moving, Mikasa felt dead inside.

She put up a front around her comrades, displaying the quiet, strong willed Mikasa, who could make people laugh with the rare, well placed quip, but wouldn't hesitate to flip you if you messed with her friends, the one who entered Trost, but didn't come back. So far it held pretty well; save for Armin, no one was the wiser. Thankfully he let her be, though...

*Flashback: Year 850, Day 2 after the Breach of Trost District*

Today was the second day of the military's shelling of Trost. Despite consistent cannon fire into the district, Titans were passing through the second breach. Those that did weren't making it too far, at first being taken out by Garrison cannon teams on the ground before those positions were overrun. Now the military was taking to the roof tops once again to take out the slowly dispersing mass of monsters. Thankfully the civilians in the town had long since been evacuated, soon after the Armored Titan broke through, so casualties there had remained at a minimum. The only thing crossing the town's border at this point were cannonballs, gas tanks, and personnel from other parts of the Wall. Thanks to the round-the-clock efforts of the Garrison, Survey Corps, and trainee squads, not a single Titan had managed to escape the town's borders.

At this point in time, Mikasa, Armin, Sasha, and several other trainees from the 104th were riding up to the military cordon surrounding the village, ready to jump back into the fray. That didn't mean they were excited for it though. They were all nervously conversing save herself, and thus pulled a bit ahead of the group.

That was when Armin decided to approach her. "Hey Mikasa, how are you holding up?"

"The evaporating blood will take some getting used to it, but it's not that different from taking on practice models." She said this in a cool tone, keeping her head facing forward as they neared the town. Armin sighed at her response.

"That's not what I meant Mikasa," he said in his serious tone.

"I'm fine," she deflected.

"Mikasa-"

"I said I'm fine Armin," she replied brusquely.

"Are you? Mikasa, I know you're trying to act like yourself, but it's not working. I can see how you're really feeling." She didn't react, at least not externally. Of course he was spot on, but that didn't mean she'd say it.

"Armin-"

"He was my friend too, and so are you! I want you to remember that. Keeping your emotions pent up inside you won't do us any good."

"..."

"I want to talk about it myself. It feels weird, not having him around anymore. But now's not the time to do so, we have a job to do," he stated resolutely. Trost had changed Armin; it steeled him, yet at the same time she could tell that it broke him too.

She turned her head, nodding reluctantly, then heeled her horse's side to push ahead. She could hear Sasha talking behind her, but the words were lost under the sounds of the horses' hoof beats. 'Yeah, later.'

*End Flashback*

Of course, later never came for them. Besides the fact that almost immediately after entering the city two more of their comrades fell to the Titans, one split down the center vertically, the tight schedules the military kept them on for the following few days left little free time to do so. On top of all that though, Mikasa really just didn't find herself wanting to talk about Eren.

She didn't know why she felt like that; maybe she didn't want Armin to feel worse himself, or maybe it was atonement through self-inflicted suffering for not keeping her promise to Karula, but whatever the reason she didn't approach Armin or anyone else on the subject.

It was eating at her though. Eren had been such a big part of her life since that fateful night six years ago, and now that that part of her life was gone forever. She felt hollow, like there was a gaping hole somewhere in her body that she just couldn't fix.

As she continued walking, her foot caught on an upended paving stone, sending her straight to the ground. Rather than getting up, she stayed down, unwilling to move a single muscle.

She remembered the last time she saw him. Eren was so angry at her. She just wanted to protect him, but...

'Do you hate me Eren?' she thought sadly. 'I'm sorry. I didn't want any of this. I didn't want you to hate me, to think I was treating you like my kid brother. I just wanted to keep you safe, to keep you alive. I wanted us to have lives beyond the military, to have a home and be a family again. You are my life Eren, ever since you saved me you were what mattered most. Did you die hating me?'

And that's when the tears began to flow. Water welled up in her eyes before streaming down her cheeks as she let out a throaty sob. All her pent up grief, pain, and loss from the past week was spilled out onto the cold, hard floor. Even after all her tears had left her, her body shook with every dry sob she took until her body was finally exhausted.

'The memories aren't enough, I can't just remember you. I miss you Eren. I need you in my life.'

She finally felt herself falling asleep. She knew she should get back to bed, but she just couldn't make herself get up. She just pulled her sheet over her body and let herself go.

'It's so cold, Eren.'

---

Year 850, Day 8 after the Breach of Trost District, 7th night after exile

He was lucky he hadn't fallen out of the tree.

As he had been about to make his bedroll, Eren collapsed. He felt extremely weak, as though his limbs were being held down by the Walls themselves, and his body just seized up. From where he fell, he could just see over the edge, a few still active Titans reaching out towards what was surely weakened prey, with their grimy hands and gaping maws.

He could taste acid and iron coming up from the back of his throat, before it spewed forward from his mouth. He had just enough movement in his neck that he could pull his head up to avoid sullyng his scarf

'What's happening to me? Am I dying?' Eren thought. Every inch of his body was felt like it was on fire, screaming in pain. If one were to see him at that moment, they would in fact see steam emanating from his body. Rivulets of blood dripping from his eyes and nose evaporated almost as soon as they trickled out. He tried biting it back in hopes that it would end soon, but it was becoming unbearable. He just wanted it all to stop.

His screams reverberated throughout the forest. Between gasps of air he could hear the echoes bouncing through the canopy before they were drowned out by his continued cries of pain.

Eventually the pain subsided, and with it the screams and the steam that he had been releasing. He pulled himself to his feet, using the tree trunk for extra support in case a second wave hit. Rubbing away the dried blood that almost sealed his eyes shut, Eren took in a few deep breathes before taking in his surroundings. 'It's quiet now,' he thought, slowly lowering his hands to his gear's grips.

He looked around, searching for a disturbance. His yelling would have scared off any nearby wildlife, but not for so long that it would remain this quiet for so long. 'Was I seen escaping? Were there soldiers sent to follow me, to kill me? No, if there were they have had plenty of opportunities to do so. Besides wouldn't I have noticed them by now?' He wasn't too sure about that.

Eren was on edge now; he was exhausted, still numb from the shock his body just went through, and he felt could be attacked any moment now. His one relief was that in the quiet he should be able to hear the zipping of cables well before anyone reached him.

Heard no such thing though; his surroundings were so quiet he could even make out the noises of the creatures surrounding him coming back.

'Wait,' Eren thought, as he relaxed his stance a bit. 'If people are nearby, aren't animals supposed to stay away? And the Titans...'

It hit him then that they weren't acting up. If soldiers were anywhere in the area, the Titans would be whipped into a frenzy. In fact, they had still been acting up when he stopped for the night.

Curiosity compelled him to look over the edge. Had they finally gone dormant? Or had they left during his fit, searching for something more interesting. Peeking down he saw that neither was true. Instead he stumbled back from the shock, for every single human caricature below was staring up at him, unmoving yet clearly wide awake. Their unblinking gazes met his, their malevolence magnified in the dying light of his small campfire.



A moment passed.

Then another.

Then another.

'What the hell is going on?'

After what Eren thought to be about five minutes through the staring contest, he began to walk along the branch's length, keeping his eyes on the monsters below. He wasn't disappointed, but definitely creeped out, when their gazes followed him, even after he turned and broke into a sprint. Rather than stopping as he neared the end of the branch, he launched himself towards the next one with his gear. Surely they'd follow after him now.

Landing on a branch a good 100 meters away from where he'd been, he looked back and was stunned; the Titans hadn't moved an inch. Some were straining their necks to watch him, but they all stayed in place, their eyes upon him.

'What's going on? Why the hell are they just standing there?'

Instances like this weren't even mentioned during training.

Everything they had learned in regards to the Titans suggested that they would doggedly pursue humans until one or the other was dead, without exception. Even Abnormals wouldn't break the chase once they had a target. There were documented cases from early after the Survey Corps conception where a soldier would outpace a Titan on horseback, only for it to arrive at camp at dusk and inflict numerous casualties. What Eren saw as he began to further himself from this group of Titans went against all that knowledge.

'Fuck this, I'm not sticking around here.' Making a full 180 around one of the giant trees, Eren sent himself back to his branch, hastily re-packing his bag before making as much distance as he could from there. He had to be careful though; the lack of light and his increasing exhaustion would not make for a safe journey. A tug of the triggers and his cables were dug deep into a branch, enabling him to

fly deeper into the forest, away from those even more abnormal Titans.

And then he was falling.

It happened so fast, or at least seemed to. The adrenaline from his episode had kept him going, but now it had started to wear off. His fingers slipped, releasing the cables as he was still descending along the arc, and was sent hurtling head over heels towards the ground. He was spinning so fast he lost his bearings on what was up and what was down.

That was when the adrenaline kicked in again. The impending need to survive woke his sleep addled mind enough that he managed to get a clear shot at the nearest tree with his right hook. No longer falling uncontrollably, Eren righted himself enough that he was only circling backwards around the tree trunk. Slowly letting out the cable with some gas sent him stumbling, yet unscathed, to the ground.

'Heh, and they wonder why I was in the top ten,' he thought triumphantly, pushing himself up, only to keel into the tree, just catching himself before his head could bounce off the bark.

'Gotta stay awake.' He pushed himself off the tree. 'I need to get to safety. If those Titans decide I'd make a good snack I'm done for.' Stepping away from the tree, Eren aimed to ascend here for the night. 'It'll have to do for now.'

The triggers clicked, but there was no sound of zipping cables spinning fans, only a small puff of air and metal striking the ground. 'Fuck, I'm out!' Yanking the now apparently empty tanks, Eren dropped his bag to grab two of the spares. Before he could open the top though, movement out of the corner of his eyes forced him to dodge.

'Dammit!' Looking back, Eren saw an arm smashed inside the tree where he had been standing a second ago. Attached to it was the disproportionally large body of a 7 meter Titan, its head looking

around the edge at Eren, hunger in its eyes as it planned to add another corpse to its gullet.

As the monster stepped forward and reached out to grab him, Eren dropped and rolled to his left, putting some distance between them. "Fuck you, you're not eating me!" Eren yelled as he dodged a hammer blow from its other arm. Drawing his blades as he ran around the beast, Eren plotted his attack.

Stopping ten meters behind the Titan, he taunted it, "Hey dumbass, how'd you feel about you just killing yourself. You'll save me the trouble of doing it for you." He then turned and started sprinting around the tree, the Titan taking a moment to turn and follow after him.

'Come on, there's got to be at least one around this damned tree.' Looking behind him, he could see the flailing limbs, but its body was hidden around the trunk. 'Can't let it see what I'm going to do. There!'

An exceptionally large root from the tree was sticking out of the ground near the base. Jumping over it, he slid to a halt and ducked down against the appendage, waiting. He could feel the ground shake as the Titan continued running. Hopefully it wouldn't stop when it was right on top of him.

'I've got one chance at this.' His muscles were tensed, ready to go at a moment's notice.

The shaking began to slow down, but it did not stop.

'Come on, closer, closer.'

You could feel the Titan getting closer now. He was tempted to look over the top of the root, but if he did then he would surely be spotted, and his plan would fail.

'Just a bit more.'

One disproportionately small leg landed less than half a meter in front of him, soon followed by a matching one another three meters away.

'Now!'

Springing from his crouched position, Eren launched himself at the Titan, releasing a primal roar as he brought his blades to bear. The anti-titan material cut cleanly through both its Achilles tendons, sending it flat to the ground.

"I've got you!" Eren turned and ran just behind the recovering Titan, up the tree trunk as far as he could before kicking off into a back flip onto its upper back. "Now die!" With that command, his blades sliced through the Titans nape, putting it down for the final time.

"How do you like that? That's just a taste of our retribution! A hundred years of pain and suffering you delivered upon humanity, now I will return it a hundred times fold!" He may not have considered himself part of humanity, but he'd still fight for it, to his last breath he'd do everything he could to return humanity to its lost glory.

Glancing down at the carved out flesh, Eren had a thought. Ignoring the heat emanating of the decomposing slice, Eren picked it up and bit into the meat...

Only to spit it right back out.

'Ack, that burns!' He dropped the slice and kicked it away. 'Tastes like shit too. I'm going to need to find one of the Survey Corps supply stations if I'm going to survive out here in the near future.'

The thud of heavy footsteps alerted Eren to more Titans approaching his position. Looking over his shoulders, a ten meter and another seven meter were quickly closing in on him.

As much as he wanted to pull another stunt like he just did, or run away to safety, Eren knew neither of these were valid options. 'Damn, looks like I've got no choice,' he thought as he raised his hand to his mouth, biting into it until he tasted blood.

Nothing happened.

'What the hell?' He bit it again, harder.

Nothing

'No, not now!' He bit into it a third time. He could've sworn he felt a bone.

Still nothing happened.

'This can't be happening he said as he ran forward, slipping between the legs of the ten meter as it tried to grab him. The seven meter reaching for him as well, but instead knocked into the ten meter, knocking them both off their feet.

Trying his other hand, Eren's mouth was again filled with the hot iron tasting liquid, but still nothing came of it.

'Why's this happening now of all times? I can't keep this up!'

It hurt to hold the blades now, his bites having torn deep into the muscle. The Titans were once again closing in on him.

'I won't die here, not without a fight.' Useless now, he dropped his grips and began wrapping his hands in his scarf to stem the bleeding. Despite the pain, he clenched his hands into fists, ready to fight like a human this time . "Hey assholes, why don't you both die already!"

The seven meter approached him first, reaching out to grab him, but rather than run as any human would have done, Eren held his ground, shaking as his muscles tensed up.

"I said die!" Eren shouted, rearing up a punch that landed right in the middle of its palm. It almost looked surprised, as Eren was, when its arm was forced backwards. It only hesitated a moment before it began reaching again.

There was no coherence this time, Eren just roared as he made to punch the Titan again. This time though, before he could make contact, the Titan was thrown back, tackled by another Titan. The earth was shaking as Eren looked behind him to see even more Titan running towards them, leaping over him and onto the two Titans he had been fighting. What was even more surprising was how viciously they began to tear into the two.

'Titans eating Titans?' As weird as it was, Eren didn't put much thought into then. He had to get his tanks before the Titans noticed him.

With his heart beating like mad and his very being screaming at him to run, Eren scrambled around the tree to his pack. After fiddling with the canisters with his injured hands, he noticed steam coming off of them. The wounds were closing now. 'Why'd it delay like that?' He finally secured the tanks, then re-shouldered his pack. Soon enough he was climbing up towards the highest tree branch he could lie on.

40 meters later, Eren looked down from his perch to watch the Titans disperse from the carnage they had sought against their own.

'They were just normal Titans, right? So why were those two eaten by the rest?' Sliding his pack off, he pulled out the bedroll and blanket and laid them beside him along the center of the branch.

'They couldn't have been shifters, could they? They were almost exactly the same as the others.' Unclipping the gear's fan and casings, Eren set it down near the trunk with his bag, before returning to his roll.

'Maybe Titans do get hungry without humans around, and just cannibalize each other sometimes. Though, I can see why they'd

prefer people over each other.' He gagged as he remembered the taste of Titan flesh. 'But that still would have been observed at least once, right? Then again, the world beyond the Walls is such a mystery to us, who knows what's true.' Looking through the darkness again, Eren did a double take, for he thought he saw a couple of the Titans that had been surrounding his campsite earlier.

'Those aren't the same Titans as before, are they?' Looking closer, trying to find something to confirm his suspicions, he saw that one Titan had some kind of chunky liquid on its face. Whatever it was, it wasn't from another Titan.

"Oh Walls, is that what I think it is? I can barely see, but I'm almost sure of it.' Indeed his eyes did not deceive him; the Titan Eren was looking at had his puke covering its face. 'That's gross.'

Getting over his disgust, Eren was even more confused now. Weren't those Titans stuck in place? Why had they moved now? What drove them to eat their own? Or were they trying to save him?

And then something clicked.

'Could it be...? Did I summon them here? No, why would they listen to me? How would that even be possible?' He couldn't process any coherent ideas on how to answer this, as his body lay on his bedding and was slowly being wrapped in sleep's embrace. Too many thoughts were racing through his mind slowly faded into unconsciousness. Eventually it was too much to handle, and his mind simply shut down, sending Eren to dreamland.

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Year 850, Day 8 after the Breach of Trost District, 1st Night Post-Graduation

'Why are you just lying there? Get up!'

"..."

'I said get up.'

'...'

'Get up.'

'...'

'For Walls sake, stop lying there and get back to bed!'

'What's the point?'

'It's going to hurt a lot less in the morning waking up in a bed.'

'So what?'

'You're going to regret it otherwise.'

'Does it matter?'

'...'

'...'

'What's wrong with you? What happened to your desire to live.'

'I'm alive.'

'No, what you're doing can hardly even be considered existing! You're not fighting; you barely eaten, sleep or train anymore, and everything else you do is so dulled down it's like you barely exist. Do you think he'd want you to be like this?'

'... No.'

'What do you think he'd want you to do then?'

'He'd want me to fight. To win. To live.'



'And what did you promise yourself back in Trost.'

'That I'd remember him.'

'You know you can't remember him if you don't live, right? You need to keep fighting.'

'But-'

'No buts. That is exactly what he would say. What you are doing is pathetic injustice to his memory. You know that to be true.'

'...'

'We have every right to mourn for those lost, but killing one's self over it only spits on their sacrifices. You have a duty to remember him, but you also have a duty to move on with life, especially with that letter you received. Got it?'

'... Yeah, got it.'

Slowly but surely, Mikasa pulled herself from the edge of consciousness and pushed herself to her feet. The white blanket that had been covering her body pooled at her before she picked them up in her arms. She began walking back towards the barracks, her stride a bit stronger, head held a bit higher, her back a standing a bit straighter, and overall she felt just a bit more like the woman who had been lost to Trost.

Despite not knowing how long she had been out of, the sun had yet to peak over the Walls. Mikasa figured she might be able to get a few hours of sleep in before they all parted for their regiments in the morning.

Ten minutes of walking later, luckily with no guards in the corridors, and Mikasa found herself outside the door to her bunk in the barracks. Slipping through the vestibule, she shut the door behind her, careful not to let the creaking wake anyone up. The sounds of

snoring and the steady breaths of sleep were enough to affirm she hadn't done so. Passing Sasha in her bunk, drooling with what was probably a loaf of bread held between her arms like a doll, Mikasa slipped into her bed.

She wrapped the blanket around her body once again, curling in on herself as she settled in. It was still very cold, but maybe Mikasa could manage to warm herself up now.

End Chapter

A.N.: So, did you guys miss me? I am really sorry about the wait. The original time table had this chapter out three months ago, but then I fell for the "Microsoft phone call scan" and had to keep my computer off until I could get it cleaned by my school's tech support. Then classes started and yeah, not a lot of sleep as it was. We should have been on chapter seven by now, and honestly I am a bit disappointed in myself. But that's all the more reason to really push for the next chapter as soon as possible. Ideas are already in the works, some of which were originally set for this chapter, but later moved as they didn't feel appropriate here. I aim to get the next chapter out around the same time chapter 63 of SNK comes out, which should be the tenth of next month. Speaking of updates, holy shit I just read chapter 62 before writing this part and oh Walls it's so bad but at the same time it's so good. It's definitely given me a lot to work with for the future now. Enough of the moody sad talk though, we have some belated birthdays to celebrate. So, let's give a a good whole-hearted happy birthday to Sasha, Reiner, Hanji, and most importantly, me, the fantastic Spartan Ninja!

Sasha: Hey Spartan, is there any birthday cake to go around? I'm starved.

What? What happened to that loaf of bread you had in bed with you?

Sasha: How'd you-

I'm the author, remember? I know everything.

Reiner: \*leaning on Sasha's head\* Thanks for the birthday wishes Spartan, it feels good to finally celebrate again.

Of course Reiner, anything for one of my story's supporting antagonist.

Reiner: Wait wh-

Hanji: SPARTAN!

\*ducks under Hanji's tackle and flips her upright before she crashes\*  
Yes Hanji?

Hanji: Did you remember to get me a birthday gift?

Er, yeah, of course I did.

Hanji: Really, where is it? Is it a Titan?

Uh, better in fact. \*he quickly grabs Reiner and pulls him between them\* Your very own Titan Shifter!

Reiner: Wait, what the hell?

Hanji: Thanks Spartan. \*She grabs the struggling Reiner and takes him to gods know where.\*

Sasha: So, cake?

Patience Sasha, patience. After all, this is my celebration too. So my dear readers, please wish us all a happy belated birthday. We wish you all the best with the chapters to come in return both here and in the canonverse. And please, don't hesitate to review. Your input helps me improve this story and grow as a writer overall. I will see you all next chapter. \*Pulls out a chocolate cake from behind his back with candles.\* There, here's the cake Sasha. Please save some for... \*Both the cake and Sasha have disappeared.\* everyone. And she's gone. It's too bad she didn't stay long enough for me to tell her that cake was laced with laxatives. Oh well, she'll be fine next

chapter. One final note, I'm going to be at New York Comic Con today (Saturday) as "Background Character #6". If you see me, don't hesitate to come over to say hi and chat and stuff. After all, I'm not a Titan, I won't bite.

Reiner: SPARTAN!

And that's my cue. Gotta go now, bye!

## Chapter 6

A.N.: S.N. Well this was long overdue. I first planned on this being done by the November chapter, but college and grades can really mess with your plans. Anyways, the last couple of chapters have basically set how I want this story to go, so hopefully that means faster updates (Woot). Also, I want to wish a very happy belated birthday to Erwin, Armin, Levi, and Bertholdt. Please don't kill me for taking so long to say that. There's not much else for me to say here, except this is not entirely proofread. I promised myself I'd get this out before New Year's, and goddamn was I going to do that. So there will be errors and a slight reduction in quality, but I'll be sure to fix that in the next day or so. I would recommend coming back in a few days to reread this so you have the final version of events in this chapter in mind, rather than this rougher version. That's it for now. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to hide from two evil geniuses, the world's most elite soldier, and a giant. Later.

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Year 850, Day 11 after the Breach of Trost District, 3rd Day with the Survey Corps

"There, how's that feel?" a chipper voice asked to the sound of leather sliding through leather.

Jean grit his teeth as his nail's dug into the wooden bedpost. He sat at the edge of the bed, his pant leg bunched up above his knee. Wrapped tightly around his lower thigh and what remained of his calf was one large, thick piece of leather, with four metal rings hanging equidistant around the top and ties running along the front. Those ties were currently being yanked on by one Hanji Zoe. She gave one final pull before finishing the knot.

"Aside from the fact that you're crushing my burn in a vice, I'm just peachy," he tried to snark, but it came out a bit too high pitched.

"That'll finish healing in the next couple of weeks. I'm sure you can push it out of mind until then." Looking up from her handiwork to face Jean, her voice took a more serious tone. "That aside, nothing else hurts? Nothing's digging into your skin or cutting into you?"

"... No," he sighed.

"Good." Her tone tightened again. "So now we can try this!" Unwrapping the cloth covered object, Jean saw what he could only assume was the prosthetic leg this Hanji lady talked to him about. It resembled a leg as much as any piece of metal could. It was comprised of a metal bar maybe 30 centimeters long with a cup on one end, presumably where his leg would sit, that had four hooks and a belt hanging from it, while the other end led to a vertical sliding joint connected to another piece of metal, held in place by a bolt. This piece was shorter and thinner than the bar, but it also wider with ridges along the side opposing the joint and an upwards bend on two sides. Attached to the both bends were two exposed springs, parallel to the bar, and attached to the cup. "It's only a prototype, so I doubt it'll be perfect the first time around, but with the measurements I've taken, it should be a close."

Jean faced the floor, disappointment in himself bubbling back to the surface. 'I'd be just fine if I hadn't gotten too cocky back there. I should consider myself lucky, almost getting myself killed out there. But still... I feel so useless.' "Will I really be able to walk again?" he asked, airing his doubts in himself.

"Hm?" Hanji looked up, her attention pulled from her work back to her patient. "Of course you will. As I have said before, not only will you be able to walk, but you will be able to fight, why else would I recruit you as I did?" She knelt down and slid the cup over the leather covering his stump.

'I can think of several reasons why.' He had heard some less than pleasant stuff from the whispers of other corpsmen in reference to himself and the Survey Corps head scientist. Amongst the terms he heard were "Titan psycho's test subject," "Experiment number thirty-

one," and "Lady's baby's next meal." 'What does a scientist do in the Survey Corps anyways?' he wondered on many occasion in the past week. Walls only knew. He just hoped none of it left him off worse than he already was. Still, he wasn't going to voice any of these, at least not until he had a tangible reason to do so. If anything right now, he should be voicing his thanks.

"Hold on, this is going to hurt a bit again." Hanji yanked on the prosthetic's belt, tightening it around his leg, earning a hiss in pain from Jean.

'Okay, maybe I'll hold back on the thanks a bit too.'

"Okay, you're all strapped in." Hanji patted his leg as she stood up. "Now let's try standing. Think you can do that?" she queried with an outstretched hand. Jean nodded and grasped it, pushing off the bed with his other hand.

He almost fell over at first. Spending most of his time on crutches or in a bed since Trost had messed with equilibrium. Thankfully Hanji grabbed on and caught him before he could hit the ground.

"Take it easy Jean. Science cannot be rushed, so neither should you." She righted him onto his good leg, letting him lean into her a bit.

"I got it," he waved her off. Balancing himself on his one leg, Jean began chanting to himself. 'Easy there Jean, easy. You can do this.' He slowly shifted his weight to the right, letting the prosthetic just touch the ground before hesitating to go any farther. 'Come on, don't chicken out now.'

Taking a deep breath, Jean settled onto his prosthetic, hissing through grit teeth as the springs pushed the leg against the burns on his stump. A jolt of pain ran through his body as a small muscle spasm pushed his leg into the top harder than he intended, almost causing him to fall over again. Again, Hanji caught him, pulling him

back upright by the shoulder. "Thanks," he muttered through his teeth, righting himself again.

A few more minutes of tentative balancing and Jean felt himself standing upright again. 'Heh, it worked.'

"Well done Jean," Hanji said, clapping her hands together before grabbing her notebook. "Now try walking forwards."

Jean hesitantly lifted the prosthetic and set it forward. He slowly shifted his weight onto the fake and off his real one, trying to keep his balance through the pain. He wobbled a bit, setting back on his real leg, before setting forth again, this time successfully.

"Excellent!" Hanji exclaimed as she took some notes down. "Could you take a few more?"

He did such. Despite the pain and almost stumbling a few times, it worked fairly well.

"This is very good Jean. Now tell me, is there anything of note you want to mention before we move on?"

"Uh, yeah actually," he shifted his weight on the leg again, biting back a groan in pain, "it does feel like it's trying to push me over backwards. Is it supposed to do that?"

"Only to an extent. It's supposed to feel natural, but then again I don't wear one, so I can't really say. Both springs should be pushing up equally though." She looked into her notebook and scribbled something into it before closing it again and stuffing it into her breast pocket. "Right, I'm going to head back to my workshop; I'm going to see if any of the other springs are better suited. I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't go falling on your face in the meantime," Hanji said jokingly as she stepped out of the small room. Jean's face fell a bit, as that could easily happen right now.



'Really lady? I really am an experiment, aren't I?' he thought incredulously. He hobbled back the bed on his god leg, careful not to aggravate his burns as much as he could. What was only a meter at the most felt like a kilometer, the way he was shifting his foot to move forward. 'Fuck it,' was his only aggravated thought as he decided to get this over with and leap onto the bed. Bending down with his right leg out behind him, Jean pushed himself forward and successfully rolled onto the mattress...

... And into the wall face first.

"Damn it that hurt!" he shouted as he grabbed what was certainly going to be a bump later.

The sounds of familiar shouting and something crashing drew his attention from his pain to the open doorway, through which he saw a running Hanji, followed shortly by four other Corpsmen, one of whom looked very familiar.

'Mikasa?'

Year 850, Day 11 after the Breach of Trost District, 1st mission with Special Operations Squad

*Earlier that day.*

Mikasa was heading to the mess to meet her new squad mates for formal introductions and training. She arrived at the entryway to a number of soldiers milling about. Three of them stood out to her though. They were settled down at the end of one of the far off tables and it seemed they were given a bit of berth by the rest. Stepping in, she could begin make out what one of them was saying.

"Seriously, a greenhorn's joining our squad? Did the Corporal's mind crack with his skull or something?" one of the three, a man who looked like Jean in ten or so years, said gruffly to his two compatriots. The woman who had delivered her that message about a week ago, something Ral, was on the guy's right. Across from

them both was a stockier man with a stern face, his hair pulled back to form a point of sorts. The former of the man's compatriots just glared at him, to which he returned with a smirk Mikasa could barely make out before returning to his drink, while the other maintained a mildly interested look.

'Is this my squad?' she thought. 'She did say she expected us to be working together in the future.'

Unappreciative of her dismissal, the woman did something under the table which caused the man to choke on his drink. "Knock it off, the both of you. Captain Levi's been through worse Oluo, I doubt a tumble across the roof tops would lend him to making poor decisions. Besides, didn't you meet the woman, Petra? What's your opinion of her?"

With the burlier man having broken the tension a bit, the soldier now identified as Petra turned to look at the other man. "She is recorded as being the southern region's number one trainee this year, and was the only rookie in the Vanguard during the invasion of Trost, so I don't doubt her skills on the battlefield." The grin on Oluo's face disappeared at that. "However..." she trailed off as she broke eye contact.

"Go on?" He motioned for her to continue. She had both of the men's full attention now, Oluo having turned in his seat towards her. Petra leaned in a bit, glancing around for anyone who might be eavesdropping. She missed Mikasa, whose back was turned to them, and continued, albeit in a more hushed voice.

"When we spoke, I felt something off about her," she stated. "I couldn't place my finger on it at first, but before I left something triggered a brief change in her composure. I don't know what it was that did it, but for a moment I could see past the front she was putting up. I haven't seen anyone so internally destroyed before."

The final sentence hung heavy around the three plus one. The former just hung their heads, not knowing what the appropriate thing

to say was after such a statement. The latter was shaking in place. She was grappling with herself internally again, between wanting to get out of there, consequences be damned, and maintaining her resolve to make things work. She didn't want others to know and make an issue about it, especially not a group of people she'd yet to meet and would have to work with so soon. She still hadn't talked to Armin about any of it yet. However, she had made it this far though; she owed it to Eren and herself to not quit.

Eventually the former started to win out, and Mikasa began to trudge back towards the passage she came from. She stopped when the still unnamed man raised his head and spoke again.

"Guess we'll have to help her pull herself together then, won't we," he said matter-of-factly.

"Are you serious Gunther? We should inform the captain when he arrives; get the girl to leave before she gets herself killed along with the rest of us." Oluo returned, some disbelief leaking into his voice as he rose to meet his gaze. Petra had also raised her head to better listen to her squad mates.

Gunther turned to Petra. "You said the Captain was keen on having this woman join us, correct?" His head was tilted slightly to the side, a knowing smirk cracking his face.

"Yes, he was," Petra tightly replied with a quick nod. "He expressed that we needed to be at 100% when he recovered, and that meant finding a new squad member. Despite going through the list of veterans in the Corps, he insisted on getting list of likely recruits from Commander Shadis. I had left the room for a bit, and when I came back he was already writing her an invitation. He didn't even have the list for a day!" Her voice stopped a couple of pitches higher than her usual steady tone, further driving the point Gunther was making.

Mikasa started stepping back a bit, still uncomfortable with the situation, but now she wanted know why she was invited to join the elites in the first place. No doubt she was skilled, but without

experience like the years they had there had to be another reason as to why she was selected above anyone else. Why her? It didn't look like she'd get much more of an answer to that, as the conversation began to shift.

"You really think he'll just drop her like that?" Oluo shook his head slowly in acknowledgement. "We gotta accept his decision and make it work however we can. And if that means providing an outlet of support then so be it. It's not like it's unusual for us to do so." He casually passed off the conversation like they were talking about today's weather.

"Bah, fine. Just don't expect me to coddle the girl in the field." Oluo began to sip his drink before spitting it out after a smack to the back of the head. "Oi, what did I do this time?" he shouted.

"Survey Corps Rule #8," Gunther started.

"Once you get your first Titan kill, you're an adult." Petra removed her offending hand. "She's written down for a dozen and half confirmed kills, plus another unconfirmed dozen at the least from event that sealed Trost's gate." Her expression shifted from lecturing to questioning. "I'm surprised the government hasn't issued a court martial on them yet."

"I heard Erwin pulled some string with Pixis to keep it under wraps. Not like anyone was watching them. Besides the point though, you get it Oluo?" Gunther's look was one of 'if you don't then you're dumber than a Titan.'

"Yeah, I got it. I'm not that dense," Oluo huffed into his cup. He paused in tilting back his cup, glancing at Petra, before taking a soothing sip of tea.

'They just accepted that?' Mikasa was surprised that they hadn't made more of an issue of, well, whatever she was going through right now. The fact that she didn't completely understand what was happening to herself scared her even more than the Titans did, but

the fact that these strangers weren't going to look down on her for this, maybe even help her, it emboldened her again to keep going.

Walking up to the table with a stride stronger than the one she woke up with, she approached the table that her new squad was at. When she crossed the point where none of the other soldiers wandered, Petra took notice, giving her a welcome smile.

Gunther looked over his shoulder, seeing Petra's eyes shift to something behind him, while Oluo, he was still enjoying his tea, at least until Petra nudged him roughly in the side. "Ack, can't a man drink his tea without being assaulted? Walls sake I-" He stopped ranting when he saw it wasn't the three of them anymore.

'Almost like Jean and...' Her thoughts trailed. She wasn't going there right now. Now she needed to make a decent first impression.

"Hi." Her voice was small and flat, held together over the tight ball of nerves and stress that she had just managed to placate.

"Hey Mikasa," Petra replied sweetly.

"This is the special operations squad, right?"

"The one and only. I'm guessing you're our new member?" Gunther asked, turning in his seat.

Mikasa nodded.

Gunther stood up, face to face with Mikasa "Name's Gunther Shultz. These are our squad mates, Oluo Bossard and Petra Ral." Oluo tilted his head forward at his name, while Petra's smile just widened.

"Mikasa Ackerman," she said tightly, bowing her head.

"So newbie, you ready for your first test as one of the Scouts?" Oluo asked, a knowing smirk creeping along his face.

"I- what? What test?" No one had told her about a test.

"Your first mission with us Spec Ops of course," Gunther said with a smile, placing a hand on her shoulder as he led her to the table.

"First things first though, you should find something to eat and sit. Captain Levi's going to be here any minute now."

"It's fine, I'm not really hungry right now." She really wasn't, too many thoughts and emotions were running through her to process whether her stomach was growling or not.

"Okay, your funeral," Gunther teased, taking his seat again. Mikasa took the spot next to him.

"So, this test..."

"Oh, don't worry; there isn't actually a test, at least not officially." Gunther started.

"There's a certain mission within the Corps that pops up between expeditions. It's been a while since it last came up, so I have a feeling it'll happen within the next couple of days," Petra stated.

"You've been saying that since we arrived here," Gunther pointed out.

"It's only been three days since we arrived," she pointed out. Gunther just brushed it off.

"Anyways, it normally takes a couple of squads to accomplish, but the last time we got it, it only took the five of us," Gunther continued.

"Granted, Captain Levi and myself could have probably finished ourselves, but can't keep all the glory to ourselves, can we?" Petra and Gunther just rolled their eyes at Oluo's display of bravado in front of the recruit.

"If you did, maybe you'd become humanity's strongest." The other three went silent, staring at Mikasa for after remark, before Petra and Gunther broke out laughing; Mikasa tried to contain herself, but

couldn't help snickering as well, while Oluo was left frowning at the three.

"Hey, that wasn't funny," he whined.

"I'm sorry, but it was," Petra spoke between giggles. Oluo just huffed. Taking a deep breath, she continued. "So the mission, right; so the Captain-"

"Oi, attention!" A voice broke through the chatter of soldiers, effectively silencing for the time being. Petra, Gunther, and Oluo all stood up immediately at attention upon hearing it, Mikasa not far behind in following suit. Bodies parted and a man limped into view.

'He's a midget,' was the first thought that crossed her mind. 'No doubt he's probably shorter than Connie. He is limping though.'

The man was indeed limping, but only slightly. One arm was in a sling, while the other was hanging at his side all bandaged up, as was the top of his head. There were a couple of still healing cuts along his jaw, and he had scar marks along his ear. He must've taken a beating back in Trost.

Then something clicked. She'd seen him before, back in Trost. He was the soldier that saved her and Armin when they had been guarding that Titan. 'So this is Captain Levi.'

"I hope you all enjoyed your impromptu vacation, because now it's time to get back to work." Stopping on his right leg a meter in front of the table, his eyes shifted from the squad to her. Rather than looking at her though, she felt him look through her for a moment. "It seems you've been introduced to everyone else, so I guess I can skip that part. My name is Captain Levi; I'm your commanding officer from this point on." His voice was flat and tired, holding an air of 'I dare you to screw with me.' It was the textbook definition of no nonsense.

He continued. "I assume that since you joined the Corps you also know what you're in for. I only have two rules in addition the Corps'

standard." He held up a finger from his unslung arm, "First rule: trust your squad. We are going to be putting their lives in your hands; you are expected to do the same." He raised a second finger. "Second: trust your gut instinct. It's what keeps the hunted alive when being hunted, and unfortunately that's the situation we're in. Understood?"

"Yes sir." 'But what if...'

He kept looking through her. After a moment passed, he spoke again. "You look like you have something to say Ackerman. Are you going to speak up or what?"

"Sir I-"

"Quit with the sir shit, I'm not some shit-ass noble from the Interior," he stated coolly.

"Captain," what she assumed was an approving look, if raised eyebrows could be considered such, "what should we do if what the squad says and what our gut says contradict each other?" There was a spark in Levi's eyes for a moment. Mikasa recognized it, but couldn't remember where she'd seen it before.

"Make the choice you think you'll least regret." That sentence echoed in her ears as he maintained eye contact. Eventually he broke it and turned to address the squad as a whole again. "As you are all aware, we have moved from our headquarters in Trost to our previous one here. We haven't used this place in years, and as a result it is utterly filthy. With all our equipment finally moved in, I expect you all to clean this place to the same standard as we had back at the headquarters in Trost." Mikasa turned her head at hearing a collective groan from the three behind her. "You will be aided by the rookies, along with any other able bodied soldier currently unoccupied. Anyone seen slacking, you have the authority to put them to work."

"Like anyone's dumb enough to let that happen," Oluo muttered. Levi must've heard that, but Mikasa saw no visible reaction from him as



he continued.

"First and foremost however, there is one individual that is exasperating the situation. The messes she makes are *usually* tolerable. However, she has managed to avoid bath day every week for the past two months and is making the smell around here even shittier."

"Called it," Petra whispered over to Oluo.

"Your mission is to bring Hanji Zoe to first room on the right of the south-eastern tower's top floor and lock her in until she doesn't smell like shit anymore. From there I'll take guard duty and you will be dismissed. Understood?" A resounding 'yes Captain' was the response from the four. "Good. You are dismissed then." With that he turned to make his way through the crowd, making towards one of the several exits out of the room.

Petra, Gunther, and Oluo followed suit, releasing their salutes and heading towards another exit. "Looks like we owe you a drink," Gunther spoke over his shoulder to Petra. She puffed her chest out a bit, while Oluo just scowled.

"Yeah, yeah, save the celebration for when we've got the resident mad scientist locked up," Oluo huffed.

"We should probably go get our gear. Don't want to be caught flat footed like Piere's squad did last time." Gunther led the way to the storage with Petra and Oluo just behind him. Mikasa had to fast walk to catch up to them, so stunned by what this mission actually was.

"Is this necessary? It feels like bit much for getting someone to take a bath." Mikasa asked.

"It is completely necessary," Petra replied, looking back at her with a straight face that could not be bluffed.

Mikasa was both confused and disturbed that this was an actual mission. Either the Corps wasn't all it was cracked up to be, which she highly doubted, or this was an actual issue, which disturbed her intensely. In all honesty, she wasn't quite sure which she'd rather the situation be.

Winding through the corridors of HQ, they eventually reached the storage room for all their gear. Ten minutes later, the four of them had their gear firmly secured to their straps and were on the hunt for the Corps' head scientist.

It was a slow process as first. They had to go room to room in the castle to ensure they didn't walk past her. Then they ran into Hanji's right hand.

"Moblit!"

"Petra, hi. You need something?" He asked politely.

They ran into him in one of the intersections carrying several large coils of rope, followed by Armin, who was carrying a large bag filled to the brim with what looked like arrowheads, judging by what was cutting through the bag's material.

"We're looking for Captain Hanji, and if anyone knows where she is, it's you."

"Don't tell me it's that time again." He groaned when Petra nodded in affirmation. Armin just looked on in confusion, not yet understanding what the exchange was going on between the two. "Last I saw her she was in her workshop tinkering with a gadget she's been building since last week. No idea what it is, been working on schematics for another gadget of her's based off our gear." Moblit's voice lowered as he went off tangent, before returning to his normal tone. "I'm assuming you already checked the workshop though, so I can't say where she is for sure. However..." He went silent, cupping his chin with his thumb and pointer. "She was mumbling something while she

was working, something about a Kirschstein. I don't know what that means, so I guess that's not much help. Sorry."

"It's fine. Guess we'll just have to keep looking on our own then." Oluo's face fell at that statement. This was going to take a while.

"I do have some good news for you though. Last I checked, Hanji didn't have her gear on, so you at least have that going for you." A sigh could be heard as the vets' faces were visibly filled with relief.

"Thanks Moblit, we'll get out of your hair now," Petra said as she smiled in gratitude.

"I should be thanking you guys. Even with my dull sense of smell the Captain's odor has become a bit much. No wonder Mike always leaves the room when she arrives." Petra nodded and led their group off through the castle. Before she passed, Armin raised an eyebrow at Mikasa, to which she responded with a silent later, and rushed to follow after her squad. She could just hear Moblit say something about Titan capturing techniques, but she was soon out of earshot.

"I know who Kirschstein is."

Not breaking his stride, Gunther looked back. "I'm guessing he's a friend of yours."

She paused. "He is," she nodded in affirmation. At least she considered him as such. He was a decent person, and his decision to join the Survey Corps earned him her respect, especially after what he went through.

"You know where he is?"

"Probably in medical."

Gunther turned to face forward again. "You here that Petra?"

"Medical, yes. It goes without saying we'll have to be extra careful not to run into anyone while we're there." She turned a corridor

leading to a set of stares, which Mikasa assumed would lead to medical, and was followed by her squad mates.

"Understood," the three of them replied.

"You think the Captain's set up there because she knew we'd be coming for her?" Oluo voiced as they made another turn.

"Hanji may be a crazy, but I wouldn't believe her to put others at risk over something like this," Gunther stated.

"Why does Captain Hanji have such distaste for baths?"

The two looked back at her, momentarily surprised at the recruit.

"You've just joined so you wouldn't know," Petra started, "but Captain Hanji is of the Corps' Head Scientist. She's responsible for many of our recent discoveries in Titan biology and behavior. She's also a bit..." she paused to find a more appropriate word to describe her. "Eccentric," she continued, giving Oluo a look. "She's dedicated to her work to an extreme degree, so much so she fails to care for herself sometimes. This is one of those instances."

"Normally Moblit and the rest of her squad take care of her when things get bad, but since she can't get clean and work without ruining her notes, this is the one thing she doesn't allow them to do for her, Gunther elaborated. "So under Captain Levi's order, the other squads need to step in."

A still questioning look on Mikasa's face led to further explanation.

"You saw Captain Levi tell us he's expecting us to clean HQ. He holds a high standard when it comes to cleaning, with an eye and nose for filth. So when someone offends those senses, well..." Gunther trailed off there.

"Hanji only gets away with it because she's normally in her workshop or with her... pets when we have them. There's a point where just

knowing bothers him though, at which he petition Erwin to allow him to take action. So here we are." Oluo finished the explanation for Mikasa.

Seeming satisfied with their answers, Oluo and Gunther returned their attention to following Petra's lead. Another minute of moving through the castle's twisting corridors ended when Petra stopped them all abruptly.

"Excuse me Petra, I need to get by. I have some equipment stored in my workshop and-"

"We can't let you go Hanji, Captain's orders." Petra's face hardened as she said that.

Mikasa could see Hanji face change from nervous curiosity to slight panic. She knew exactly where this was going.

"While appreciate Levi's concern for my hygiene, I really am fine. I do have other things that I need to attend to now, so if you'll excuse." She darted away from them at a full tilt, with Petra, Oluo, and Gunther right behind her. It took a moment for Mikasa to register the inanity of this situation before brushing it aside to rush after the captain.

"Captain please, don't do this again!" Gunther shouted.

"No, there are more important things that need to be done!"

Mikasa turned the corner to see Hanji sliding between Connie and Sasha's legs as they were carrying a small crate with what was probably food from the kitchen. She knocked out the back of their knees and they were sent stumbling to the floor, right in their way.

Petra and Oluo stumbled over them, but Gunther and herself were able to vault over their fallen comrades to continue.

"Sorry," Mikasa heard Hanji yell over her shoulders as she hit the ground running. She saw Hanji grab a protrusion from the side of the wall and made a sharp right turn. Gunther ran past, not catching her change in direction quick enough, but Mikasa followed Hanji's example, also grabbing the stone and continued the chase.

The corridor was tight, the chk chk sound of her gear bouncing off the walls the Captain slowly got further away. She could hear Petra following her from behind and the Oluo telling Gunther they should go around to try and cut her off.

Ahead she saw the end of the passage lead into another intersection. Hanji dove left around the corner, disappearing from sight. When Mikasa turned, she took all of ten steps before stopping. There was no sign of the Captain anywhere in the corridor ahead of them.

A few moments later, Petra stopped behind her. "Where'd she go?" Mikasa shrugged. Then she heard the tap-tap-tapping of running footsteps. Looking behind her, she saw an open door just behind them and Hanji already twenty meters away from them, running full tilt.

'This is getting ridiculous,' Mikasa thought to herself. She dropped her hands to her grips and fingered the triggers. This caught Petra's attention.

"Wait Mikasa, we're not allo-" but she was cut off as Mikasa was already off. Pulling the trigger, she began releasing her gas between strides as she sprinted after Hanji, rapidly closing the distance between the two of them

The sound of the releasing gas must've caught her attention; when Mikasa was less than a meter away, Hanji looked over shoulder all she could see was Mikasa practically on top of her. Before she was able to react, Mikasa hooked her left arm around her, then pivoted on right foot, taking Hanji off her feet. Pulling the trigger for the right

cable, she hooked the ceiling just in time to keep them both from slamming onto the stone floor.

"Heh, impressive form," Hanji complimented her, trying to get out of her grip but to no avail. Righting herself up, she threw the Captain over her shoulder, earning an oomph from her, and proceeded back towards where she left Petra.

"What was that?" she exclaimed. "Don't you know how dangerous using your gear indoors can be?"

"I do," Mikasa stated flatly.

"Then why do it?"

"I was confident enough in my abilities not to hurt myself or anyone else in doing so."

"That took some real precision there. She's almost as good as Levi," Hanji commented from over Mikasa's shoulder.

Gripping the bridge of her nose, Petra sighed. "Look, just don't do it again, okay? We lose enough people as it is during expeditions, we don't need to lose any doing stunts inside HQ. Understood?"

"Understood," Mikasa nodded. It may not have been the smartest of moves, but it sure did catch Captain Hanji a lot quicker than they had made it out to be.

"At least we won't be spending the day going after her." Petra smiled at that though.

"Do my eyes deceive me?" Gunther stated after stepping around the entrance to a passageway off this one with Oluo not far behind. Mikasa and Petra turned to face them, while Hanji now turned away from them.

"If you're seeing the Greenhorn holding Captain Hanji over her shoulder too then I think we're both going crazy," Oluo said aside.

"Come on, let's find Captain Levi and head to the tower," Petra said as she walked off, Mikasa now in tow.

It didn't take long find the Captain. He was in his room adjacent to the rest of the squad's bunks. Trekking there, Mikasa earned the stares of most the Corpsmen they all passed. Word must've spread that today was the day some poor saps had to grab Hanji, so seeing her over a recruits shoulders of all things must've been quite a shocker. Unknowingly to Squad Levi, their faces soon turned from shock to fear, for as Hanji hung there, she had a creepy smile on her face that said this wasn't the end.

"Enter," was the response Squad Levi elicited when they knocked on Levi's door. Entering, one could have been excused from missing Levi's brief look of shock, which consisted of a brief rising of his eyebrows and an uptick in the corner of his lips. "Well, that was quick." He groaned slightly as he stood up and limped over to them. "Come on Shitty Glasses, let's get you clean. You don't need to smell like your glasses after all." He patted the top of her head as he passed by.

Oluo, Gunther, and Petra couldn't help but chuckle at Levi's joke, while Hanji faux pouted a bit before chuckling herself. Mikasa just smiled. It wasn't that funny, but at least the shorty had a sense of humor. He seemed a bit stuck up beforehand.

Soon they found themselves at the top of one of the castle's towers, an odd place for a bath when one had to bring water from a stream or well.

Entering, the designated room, she was surprised to see that this bath had an unusual crisscrossing of metal leading to and from it. She had never seen something like this before.

"Before the Corps left here, one of the members who happened to be one of the few from the Interior constructed this contraption. It uses rainwater and sunlight from the roof to make a decent bath, and drains out the exterior wall. At least that's what I've heard, haven't



had a chance to use it myself," Levi explained. "Now, Shitty Glasses, I'm going to be waiting right outside the door until you're clean to my standards, understood?"

"Crystal Levi," she said, giving him a thumb up.

He just looked at her before looking up to face Mikasa. "You can put her down now." She complied, setting her on her feet. "Petra, lead everyone outside. I'd like to talk, then you should lead everyone through the regular drills for cleaning HQ."

"Yes Captain!" She led them out one by one while Levi just kept watching Hanji who just stood there smiling at him.

"You're really smiley for having just been caught so quickly."

"Can't I just be glad to spend time with my favorite person in the Corps?" She replied innocently.

"Nope." Her face fell. "Gunther, mind coming back in here, I need you to check the closet over there." Gunther stepped back in, following his Captain's instructions.

"Oh now there's no need for that, is there?" Her voice was losing its innocence and gained a hint of begging.

Gunther opened the closet, and right there in the center was a full set of gear. "Yes, there is," Levi replied. "Being Humanity's Strongest means nothing unless you have some brain to back it up." With that Gunther took the gear out, with Levi three limps behind him. Exiting the room he closed the door behind him, effectively sealing Hanji in until Levi deemed otherwise.

Save for the fact that behind the stack of towels in the closet there laid another set of gear. 'Levi may not be dumb, but I'm not Humanity's Smartest for nothing.'

She turned the faucet to let the water into the tub, then hastily attached her gear. It wouldn't due if Levi suspected her of doing something besides taking a bath. She opened the one window in the room, and after turning the faucet she was gone.

Year 850, Day 11 after the Breach of Trost District, Debrief of the Special Operations Squad

"I don't know how you caught her so quickly, but there has yet to be any shouts about someone getting injured today, so whatever you did, well done." Levi gave them an almost smile.

"Mikasa caught him sir. She used her gear to catch Captain Hanji when she almost gave us the slip," Petra piped up.

"Really?" Mikasa nodded. "Well I'm not supposed to condone use of 3DMG inside HQ. However, these were extenuating circumstances, so we'll give this a pass."

Not immediately realizing what he meant by that, she snapped into a salute. "Thank you sir!"

"Welcome to the Special Operations Squad, Ackerman. You're all dismissed now." He leaned back against the closed door and closed his eyes.

"Let's go, we have a lot of work ahead of us. We need to give Mikasa a true introduction the Special Operations Squad," Petra said, leading them out of the tower.

Half an hour later, Levi knocked on the door. "Oi, Shitty Glasses, you finished up in there?"

No response.

"Oi, I'm coming in if you don't respond in the next five secnds."

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

Opening the door, he saw a tub filled with water, but no Hanji. Looking over at the closet where Gunther had confiscated her gear, he saw that the towels had been displaced, and behind them, a space big enough for another set of 3DMG.

"Shit."

Year 850, Day 11 after the Breach of Trost District, 3rd Day with the Survey Corps

After about two hours of waiting, the return of Captain Hanji was a welcome sight.

"Sorry about the wait Jean. Things can get pretty hectic around here. So about those springs."

---

End

A.N.: S.N. Well I'm not dead yet, so that's a good thing, isn't it. Otherwise there'd be no more chapters of this story. Right?

Erwin, Armin, Levi, Bertholdt: Hmph...

S.N. Well anyways. I hope you enjoyed Mikasa's introduction to the Special Operations Squad. I'd like to give a big thanks to Tumblr user drinkyourfuckingmilk for giving me the idea of a Hanji bath mission. It was a great idea and I'm glad I got to execute it. Just so you all know though, this was a onetime thing. I'm not planning on any other joke missions like this in the near future. I apologize to those who both wanted more of this and those who disliked this

(hopefully there are none of the latter). However there were some other developments this chapter that should make up for it, if you were opposed to it. Next chapter we will get much more varied plot stuff. We will go a bit more into our 104th friends in the Survey Corps, maybe visit Eren, and then we'll hit a time skip. I know you all want our friends reunited with our favorite Titan shifter, and I assure you this will happen soon enough. Just hang on a bit longer please. With all that said, I hope you all have a Happy New Year. See you all in 2015.

## Chapter 7

A.N.: S.N.: \*fishing off the top of the Wall\* Hey, glad to see you're all back for more. So last chapter I said we'd be getting a bit more into our 104th friends and how they're doing, including BAR (Bert, Annie, and Reiner). Well I lied. I small plot point with Eren exploded in a way I loved, so this chapter will focus on him again. Sorry. Next chapter I promise I will deliver the previously promised content. Before we continue though, hold on \*struggles to reel in the rod\* got a doozy on the line. \*reels in a wild Ymir\* Ah there we go; Historia, Ymir, happy belated birthdays \*hands the queen her girlfriend\*. Any who, we've all seen what's to come in the last chapter: Eren's did the thing and is safe, as is everyone else. Isn't that right Eren?

Eren: Only until chapter 68. Walls know what'll happen there with Rod crawling towards the Wall like that. I'm not sure the cannons will do much.

S.N.: Don't worry Eren; everything will be fine. Besides, you have Shounen Protagonist Protection, guaranteed to last until the penultimate chapter of a series.

Eren: What about everyone else though? And what the hell does that m-

S.N.: Also, I want to wish our resident badass \ here a happy belated birthday, so happy birthday Mikasa. Here's your gift \*shoves Eren at Mikasa with a bow in his hair\*. So now without any more diatribe, let's get to chapter 7 of The Rogue Titan.

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Year 850, Day 18 after the Breach of Trost District, 17th day into Exile

It was a couple of weeks since Eren had escaped the Walls, escaped humanity, and lived through the incident with the Titan

horde. Since then he had yet to travel further into Titan territory, deciding to set up camp in one of the trees. They provided a sort of safety of which nowhere outside the Wall Roae could provide, save the top of Wall Maria; Eren wasn't eager to make another long distance trip like that though, with everything that had happened last time. It took a couple of days before the taste of bile was completely gone.

In the time gone by, he had attempted on many occasions to repeat what he had done with Titan horde. His results were, well...

---

*Year 850, Day 12 after the Breach of Trost District, 11 th day into Exile*

*Releasing his cables, Eren dropped the last half meter to the nearby branch, much lower than he had been going for the past day. About fifty meters ahead of him and only a meter below eye contact was an 11 meter Titan, back turned to him.*

*'This is going to be what, the thirteenth Titan I've tried this on? Still have to try though. If I can learn how I controlled those Titans, it could make all the difference.'* Eren inserted two blades into his holsters and removed them, crossing them in front of him. Smashing them together, he shouted, "Hey asshole, over here!" trying to get the Titan's attention.

*It worked, as the Titan turned and began walking towards Eren.*

*Holstering his blades, Eren tensed up, preparing for what may or may not happen. 'This is it.'*

*Taking a breath from the bottom of his lungs, he let out all his pent up energy in an explosive, "STOP!"*

*The noise reverberated through the forest, and some birds were scattered from their resting place. As for the Titan though...*

*Nothing.*

*It was still coming at him. It was now thirty meters away.*

*"Hey, I said STOP!" He tried again, louder than before.*

*Still nothing.*

*The Titan was now less than 15 meters away, and would soon be able to grab him. Already its arms were reaching forwards, ready to pull Eren into its maw.*

*'Damn it, this isn't working,' he thought, growling through gritting his teeth. 'One more time, then I'll have to r-'*

*Eyes widened in shock as the Titan left the ground and flew towards him, its horrible gaping mouth ready to swallow him whole. Eren rolled to the side, extending his lease on life, but only for a minute more, as he was unable to move far enough to dodge the outstretched arms of the monster. He was knocked off the branch and smashed onto the ground, pinned under the arm.*

*Despite having surely broken a rib or several, Eren was coherent enough to try to scramble out from under the Titan's arm before its head regenerated. The monster's arm was surprisingly light considering the size and the strength its kind were known for. With some effort, Eren managed to shove the arm off and free himself.*

*Just as he righted himself, Eren noticed the arm twitch. A split second later he was on his knees clutching his ribs several meters from where he just stood, a small crater and a giant hand taking his place.*

*Eren could see from his peripheral that the Titan was slowly righting itself, its head complete again. 'I need to get retreat. I can't fight a Titan like this.' He lifted one hand in front of his face. 'I could transform, but that might attract other Titans. And if I lose my gear, I won't be able to get back to camp.'*

*Taking a deep breath, Eren grasped his grips and aimed for one of the higher branches. Once again he couldn't manage to control a Titan, and this time he had come out less than unscathed.*

*'What am I doing wrong?' He thought as he flew away. Passing what he thought was 25 meters upwards, certainly out of range of any surprise attacks from the Titans, Eren landed on a branch to catch his breath. 'Why can't I control them? Could it be that maybe... maybe it's like my transformation? Do I need the same kind of intent?'*

*A hiss of pain slipped through his teeth as he swore he felt a rib shift.*

*'I hope these heal quickly. Everything else has so far.'*

---

## Present Day

Fortunately enough it had been just as he hoped, Eren's ribs had repaired themselves within the hour. This reinforced the idea in his head that any injury he received, so long as it wasn't fatal, would heal quickly. 'Like a Titan,' he thought darkly.

It wasn't an excuse to be reckless though, especially knowing what overusing his abilities could do. It was a small comfort though, living in a place where anything beyond basic first aid was now non-existent.

It had been about a week since that specific incident. He'd tried to control a Titan a number of times since, albeit without being tackled to the ground, but to his dismay none of the Titans reacted like they did that first time.

Was it possible that maybe there was something else behind the Titans attacking one of their own? It had crossed Eren's mind that maybe that Titan was a shifter like him. That would explain the actions of the horde. However, something in his gut told him that it was he who, for lack of better words, "summoned" the Titans.



Now however, all efforts to realize that power had come to a halt as he realized his situation was a bit direr than he had previously been aware of.

Set on his perch high above the forest floor, Eren had dumped the contents of his pack.

"Damn, are there any left? I should have kept better track of these." Reaching the bottom of his bag, he found a singular ration bar. "Looks like this is the last one," he sighed despondently, taking a bite out of the dense biscuit.

'If only Armin was here. He'd have thought of this ahead of time, rather than chasing Titans every day.' Eren took another aggravated bite and reached for a canteen.

"Hm?" He looked at the canteen with a confused expression. He gave it a couple of shakes, and with no noise he checked the other two. No noise from either of them. "Shit, out of water too. At least I know where I can get that."

Finishing off the biscuit, he wedged the canteens behind his waist belt and began moving along the branches. 'I'm almost out of gas too. Walls, if I run out, getting back up here's going to be almost impossible.' Taking a calming deep breath, he dropped down to an adjacent branch, and continued. 'One thing at a time Eren; you're not Armin or Mikasa, but you were ranked 5th for a reason, you can figure this out.'

Jumping from one branch to another, he continued.

'I have water, just not with me. Hopefully there won't be any Titans near the stream.'

He landed on another limb after making a running jump from another.

'Food should be fairly easy. Nuts, berries, can find them close to the ground. Only issue is the time it takes time to pick a decent amount. I could also try hunting. Shadis did teach us gear could be used for more than just killing Titans.'

With a quick burst of gas, Eren let his momentum carry him over to the next branch

'Gas though... that'll be hard to replace. This forest is a ways away from the path between Trost and Shigansina, so there's no chance of finding one of the Corps' forward bases. A corpsman's corpse, maybe, but who's to say those tanks would still be intact, let alone have gas in them.'

Eren stopped. Looking down, he could see the stream and, thankfully, no Titans.

'There's not really any way around it though. If I run out, I'll be stuck on the ground. I won't be able to get my supplies, and if I don't find other shelter I'll surely be Titan food.'

Taking pause, he lifted his right hand into view.

'If it comes down to it, I could always use my Titan form. I haven't used it since I got here. Maybe...'

He frowned and shook his head. As useful as the ability might be, the idea of doing so still bothered him.

'I have no idea what might happen if I do that again. It was really hard to get out of the Titan the more I used it. Who's to say next time I won't get stuck, become one of "them".'

That thought left a bad taste in his mouth. 'There is no excuse for it. I may not be human, but I refuse die and I certainly refuse to become a Titan, not any more than I already am!' He clenched his hand and slammed over his heart, holding his other behind his back. While no longer serving its purpose, so far from any traces of humanity, the

military's salute granted Eren a modicum of comfort. It brought him back to better times, with the trainees of the 104th, with his friends, Armin and Mikasa.

He released the salute, calmed down from his furious train of thought, and grabbed the hooks from the left side of his gear. Pulling out several meters of cable out, Eren got on his knees and began swinging about a meter of wire in a circle, letting a bit out every few swings. After gaining sufficient length and speed, he swung the wire under the bottom of the tree. A couple of seconds later, the hook hit the top of the branch a bit ahead of him.

Before it could slide off, Eren slid forward to grab the end and cinched one of the hooks onto the cable coming out of his gear. Giving a couple of strong tugs on the loop, Eren nodded in satisfaction. Stepping to the side of the branch, he thumbed the release on the left grip so the wire released slow enough for him to hit the ground safely.

With a solid surface eventually beneath him again, Eren approached the stream, fingers still on the triggers to let out more cable. There was just enough cable for him to reach it without the cable going taut.

It took only a few minutes to refill the canteens, and couple more to quench his thirst.

As he finished and was ready to head back up, Eren heard the rustling of foliage coming from the base of the tree he was anchored to.

With the possibility of the noise being due to a Titan, Eren pulled the retracting trigger and was pulled back up into the tree. Scrambling up the side of the branch, Eren looked down at what his would-be attacker.

Rather than the disfigured human Eren had expected to see, he saw a normal one step into the open beneath him, guiding a horse

besides them towards the stream. He couldn't see much of the individual, but the tattered wings on what must have once been a cloak suggested that they were Survey Corps.

Eren shifted back onto the branch, out of any possible line of sight with the soldier.

'Dammit, the Survey Corps are out here? Why?' He thought panickedly. 'Have they been tracking me for the past two weeks? Where's the rest of their squad?' Looking in all direction from his position against the branches, Eren expected to see more soldiers appearing, but same as that night over a week ago there was nothing. No voices, no whirring of fans and wires, nothing beyond the noises of nature around him.

The silence allowed his mind to calm down, turning to a more rational thought process. 'It seems they're alone. Why though? That's extremely unsafe, especially on the ground.' Eren looked over the edge again and saw the soldier kneeling at the stream, their horse taking a drink besides them. Judging by the numerous strips of green and red cloth wrapped around their body, it seemed they were quite injured.

'Do I reveal myself? Or do I just wait for them to leave?' His choice was taken from him when a 7 meter class stumbled out of the brush across the stream. It caught the soldier in its gaze and started running-flailing towards them. They tried to mount their steed, but fell to the ground halfway up when the horse reared in panic. It ran off, and without their horse the soldier began limping away from the Titan, albeit at a much slower rate than the monster.

As the distance between the two closed between the two, the soldier made no effort to grab their grips. 'Don't tell me their gear's busted?' Eren thought rhetorically.

There was a moment of conflict within him, brief as it was, where he weighed letting the soldier fend for themselves in order to preserve his cover, but that was pushed down without a second's hesitation. He

couldn't stand by and watch someone get eaten alive, not while he could do something about it.

Standing up, Eren threw himself off the right side of the branch, hooking his cables into another tree. Leaning hard to his left, Eren began shifting his momentum so he could arc around to the rear of the Titan. Releasing the wires as he reached the bottom of his arc of motion, Eren took aim at a larger branch much closer to the ground, maintain his leftwards tilt. One more arc and he'd have a straight shot at the monster.

As he was on the move though, the soldier had been caught and was now in the monster's grasp.

'Faster. Faster! FASTER!' Eren chanted in his head as he now completed his third arc. Firing his right cable into the ground a few meters from the beast's right, Eren released an excess of gas just as the soldier's torso was shoved into the malformed mouth. Just as the Titan clamped down, Eren released a roar of defiance and sliced through its neck, almost beheading it.

It fell to the side with a thump, Eren landing just beyond the corpse. Turning, he rushed to see the condition of the soldier. It wasn't good.

Pulling the soldier out of the Titans mouth, the most obvious injury was the obvious tooth marks in their body. Had he been a second slower, this person would have been bitten in half. As it was, there were several growing blood patches along their torso. There was even a tooth lodged into the left side of their ribs.

Along with those injuries were the previously identified ones wrapped in tatters of the cloak the soldier had been wearing. Lowering the hood Eren saw that the soldier, who he could now see was a woman, had an additional injury to her forehead, also wrapped in green cloth and blood matted hair.

Despite all this, she was alive and breathing, if just barely. Whether she was conscious though...

"Hey, can you hear me? I know you're alive! Wake up; it's not safe here!" Eren shouted, trying to rouse the soldier. By some divine luck she came to with that last bit.

"Aaugh... m' chest... m' 'ead..." she groaned out, trying to shift to a sitting position through what was evidently intense pain. Opening an earth colored eye, she looked towards where the rousing voice came from. "Wha'... 'appened?"

"No time for that now; can you move?" Eren asked breathily, the adrenaline from the kill starting to pass.

"hink so," she wheezed, trying to stand up. Before she could fall and hurt herself, Eren slipped his head under her arm for support. "hanks."

"Save it until we're off the ground. How's your gear." She was standing now, despite leaning heavily on Eren. 'Must've messed up her leg real bad,' he thought.

She shook her head and frowned. "Fell off m' 'orse t' wrong way. Broke t' tanks."

"I see. Hop on my back then." The soldier nodded, wrapping her other arm around his neck and hooking her legs around his thighs, just below his gear. She hissed in pain as her torso bumped against Eren's back, but still held on tight as they began flying up into the trees, preferring to endure it than experience hitting the ground again.

Reaching the branch Eren had been perched on he set the soldier down against the trunk of the tree. "There, we're safe now," he said with a sigh of relief. Focusing his attention on the fact he now had a soldier of the Survey Corps, the group he has both idolized and been hoping to avoid since his departure, with him, Eren decided he should try to get some answers. "What were you doing down there alone? Where's your squad?"

"Dunno. Somet'in' 'appened with t'expedition, Erwin called retreat 'posedly." Her words were slurred, probably a concussion when she fell off her horse. "M' squad was in t'vanguard. Titans showed up, n' we 'ere separated from er'yone. Lost 'em too. Made m' way t'a supply post, hun'ered down fer a few days,'opin' t'e o'ers might arrive. They di'n't, so I rode to Trost, b'too many Ti'ans. 'ried to circle 'round, ended up cuttin' through 'ere, buncha Ti'ans though. I hit m'self hard 'n the head killin' one n' fell off my horse bit af'erwrds. 'n t'en 'ere I am."

Eren felt a twinge of guilt after hearing her story. Had he been strong enough to kill the Colossal Titan, she might've made it out and back okay. He forgot that with the high casualty rates the Corps had she'd just as likely be dead or injured otherwise.

"You stuck ou' 'ere too?" She asked, looking up from her sitting position at the wings on his breast pocket.

"Yeah, I am," Eren said, which in reality wasn't far from the truth. Thinking on his feet, he built a partial lie on that half-truth. "My squad was killed by Titans, leaving me to make it on my own. I panicked, ended up here, but my ride was ruined by a Titan. Had to put her down, but that was food for a while."

"'m guessin' you're green?"

"A bit, yeah." Eren rubbed the back of his head in faux embarrassment,

She chuckled a bit. "Shoulda s'ayed more south-wes' a ways. Supply post s'about maybe seven'y five o' hun'ered kilos in an ol' castle 'long the way from Trost t'Shiganshina, s'where I was.' She chuckled a bit more before yelping in pain.

'Shit, that's right, she's injured real bad.' "Here, let me take a look." She offered no resistance as got down in front of her and peeled the bottom of her shirt upwards.

Most of the indents on her ribcage didn't break the skin, however without a doubt there were busted ribs and some internal bleeding, judging by the discoloration of the skin. There were open wounds over her stomach and where the tooth was lodged in, having cut through the cloth. Eren didn't touch for fear of making her bleed more profusely.

"Can you shift on your side?" She nodded, hissing as she slowly twisted to her right. There was another laceration on the right side of her spine, but thankfully it didn't look cut over it. "Alright, it doesn't look too bad. If I clean and re-bandage everything you should be okay for a while." Eren was met with another affirmative nod. "Mind if I use your cape? I'm going to need some cloth for the bandages." For a moment she looked reluctant, but then she gave him a sad smile and shook her head.

"S'your name?" she queried as Eren began slicing strips from the retrieved cape.

Should he tell her? She wouldn't the whole Titan thing or even who he was since she didn't make it back to Trost.

"Eren, my name's Eren."

"M' names R-R-Briana," she strangled out.

"Sorry we had to meet like this, wish it were under better circumstances." He wet a strip with some water from one of his canteens and began cleaning the area around her torso wounds.

"S'okay, coul'n't be 'elped," She smiled a sincere and slightly bloodied smile.

"Yeah," he replied absently with a tight nod. With the wounds cleaned, Eren tied a couple of the cloth strips together and began wrapping them around her torso. Not wanting push to Titan tooth in any further, he said, "Brianna, I'm going to tie off this bandage now,



but first I want to get rid of this tooth. Okay?" She hummed affirmatively. "Ready, on three then: one, two, three!"

With a forceful tug, the tooth came free. Brianna only twitched with this action, but the now open wound was dripping rivulets of red along her oak colored skin. Moving quickly, Eren covered it with the bandage, the green turning red, and tied it off.

"There, now to clean the rest." Grabbing a canteen, he opened the top and passed it to her. "Here, drink."

Taking the canteen, she took several long, slow sips as Eren worked on her previous injuries, only pausing to switch arms as he reached the wounds on each if them. She stopped when she heard Eren gasp as he unwrapped her head bandages.

It didn't look pretty from Eren's perspective. He could see bone poking out from under the skin on her forehead right down the middle. The blood had scabbed over, but Walls, that only made it look worse.

"'ow's m' 'ead doc?" she slurred with a hollow chuckle.

"I uh... well eh... it's..." "How do you say it Jaeger?"

"Bad," she frowned darkly.

"My dad was the doctor, not me. I can't do anything beyond rewrapping it, but if we make it back to the Walls the doctors there'll probably be able to do something about it." He tried to sound hopeful, but the odds of that in the state she was in were slim. Maybe if he transformed... No, that was the reason he was out here in the first place.

"Ya see whe'e Babel wen'? He woul'n't 'ave gone off t' far." Brianna looked hopeful, despite the pain she had to be in. She believed they could make it back.

'Fuck it, I have to at least try to bring her back. I'll figure things out, but to hell if I let someone die from my inaction.' Grabbing the washcloth, Eren carefully tended to the area around the break. "Your horse's name's Babel?"

"Her, 'n yeah, been m' steed for t' pas' three 'ears." Her smile widened. "She's suc' a sweet thin', ain't afraid'a not'in' 'sides a Ti'an in 'er face." She paused. "Carro's migh' 'elp though. Found some 'n a pa'ch ou'side the pos', grow 'll 'n their own."

"You have some?" he asked as he wrapped a fresh cloth around her head, careful not to tie it so tight it might jar the bone.

"Lef' breas' pocket. Can you get'em, m' arms are killin' me?"

"Yeah, just let me secure this first." Eren gave the knot a final tug before stepping back.

Given what he had to start with, Brianna was fairly set. Based on what he could remember from his father's work and his own training though, she could die soon if she didn't get medical treatment. He needed to find that horse.

"Front left you said?" She hummed an affirmative noise. Kneeling down, he undid the button holding the pocket closed and removed the orange roots. They were oddly shaped and a bit dirty, but all the carrots he'd ever had were prepared in one way or another.

As he stepped back, tucking the treat in his own breast pockets, Brianna giggled a bit.

"What's so funny?" Eren wondered what could possibly have her laughing in this situation.

"It's not'in' really; jus', you're a good pe'son, Eren. You 'elped me w'en mos' ot'ers woul' leave me to die. 'opefully I can 'elp you in re'urn." She gave him a full-toothed, closed eye smile. People like this, people like Brianna, were the reason Eren was fighting. They

deserved lives where they didn't have to live in fear of the Titans. Saving her would be a step in that right direction.

"Thank you Brianna. I'll be back soon with Babel and then we can get the hell out of here." He returned her smile in full and ran off into the trees.

---

It didn't take too long to find Babel. As Brianna said, he didn't run far off; it was just a pain to look around all the trees without using too much gas. By the time he found the steed he could have sworn he was running on fumes.

Thankfully the area was devoid of Titans, and as such he landed a ways from Babel to avoid startling her. A slow approach towards her mixed with use of her name and an offering of carrots had Babel meet Eren halfway.

"Good girl. Now come on, we have to get our friend," Eren said as he mounted up. Almost as if she knew what he was saying, Babel neighed in reply and began trotting back towards the stream.

It was only five minutes and he was back in the clearing. Unfortunately it wasn't so clear this time around. Gathered around the tree Brianna was in were two 15 meter Titans with three twelve meters tagging along. One of the 15 meters was pressing its arms and legs against the occupied tree and an adjacent one in an attempt to climb up. So far it had made it up maybe thirty meters at the top of its head, leaving maybe five, ten meters between it and Brianna.

"Walls dammit," he muttered angrily under his breath. Eren hopped off Babel and tied her reigns to the nearest low hanging branch he could find. He then began running at the next nearest tree. "Hang on Brianna, I'm- huh?"

While running, Eren missed the fact that his cables shot out only a meter before dropping to the ground, tripping him up, and sending

him down.

"No, fuck," he yelled, as he pushed himself up. He was grounded. Not only that, but two of the 12 meters noticed him and were now ambling towards him, and the climbing 15 meter had just sunk its teeth into the branch Briana had been resting on. Staring down at his hands, he thought, 'This is it, I have to use it now, or she'll certainly die.'

Undoing his cloak and releasing the safeties that held his gear to the belts, Eren began running forward to meet the Titans head on, hand right by his mouth. When he closed the distance to about 25 meters, he broke skin.

Not a second later lightning struck, and where Eren had been running now stood an extremely muscular 15 meter Titan with jaws void of cheeks, knife sharp ears, and eyes filled with rage directed at its kin before it.

A swift one-two punch knocked the heads of beasts clean off, after which the stumps were stomped into oblivion.

'Die, die, die,' was the one thought in Eren's head as he exterminated his quarry, before the loud thump of a large body hitting the ground turned his attention to the other three.

The one that had had its teeth in the branch above had broken the majority of it off. As far as one could see, there was no trace of any body or blood around it. Not that he cared. He just wanted to see these abominations die. The two that had remained on the ground turned to avenge their fallen fellows, or just eat him, while the third laid on the ground regenerating. Out of the brush at two o'clock came a 5 meter with an unusually long head running really fast and an 8 meter with stubs for arms.

Deciding to be a bit malicious, Eren punted the rapidly moving midget into its trailing comrade. His aim was true and he definitely caved the chest of the larger one, knocking it off its feet

With two knocked down, he ran to engage the larger ones. He threw a haymaker at the 12 meter, but it managed to dodge to the side and clamped down on Eren's over-extended bicep.

'How dare you!' Eren raised his now wounded right arm, lifting the 12 meter off the ground with it, and swept left. This hit the 15 meter in the skull, knocking it down.

Before it could recover, Eren pulled his injured arm close to his body and slammed his entire body's weight onto the offending Titan's skull, through the prone 15 meter's skull, and into the ground. This crushed both their heads into steaming mush and left Eren's right arm shattered as he got up.

Now the 5 meter and 8 meter were back up and on the attack. The 5 meter jumped into the air to bite his face, but Eren just opened his jaw in return and bit down on the top half of its head before grabbing the body with his left hand and smashing it into a pulp against a tree.

With the 8 meter Titan still closing in on him, Eren knew just how mindless these things were to just keep on coming just to be slaughtered one after another. He relished it. With his unshattered left hand, he hammer dropped his fist onto the 8 meter's skull, crushing it like a melon.

With all his prey defeated, he let loose a load, long roar in victory.

"Eren?" he heard a voice try to cry out. Looking around, he saw a small, brown faced figure up on the edge of a busted tree branch. "Eren, are you ali-"When it made eye contact with him it froze.

'Prey.'

Eren leapt at a branch, pulling his body up with his one arm, then launched himself at another. He could now see the tiny thing, smaller than all the others. It was almost too easy. Jumping one more time, he scooped up the tiny screaming thing in one hand, before landing back down on the ground.

Bringing his prey before his face, he watched as it squirmed in his tightening hand, before grabbing something sharp and stabbing his finger.

'How dare you.' He thought as he began to clench his fist harder around the creature. 'I will crush... you?'

In its dying throws, the thing made eye contact with him again, only this time something registered in his mind.

'Brianna? No! Why am I doing this?' He loosened his fist and set her down as carefully as he could.

Taking several steps back, Eren's Titan body began to disintegrate. He still didn't know exactly how to describe how he did it beyond that he willed himself to be free from his Titan body and it happened.

Wrenching himself free from the tendons that held him in, he saw Brianna staring him down. She was still laying in the crumpled pile he left her, sword weakly pointed at him while blood dripped from her mouth, an angry frown now marring her face.

"Eren?" she queried softly, almost to the point Eren couldn't hear her. Her sword arm faltered for a moment when she recognized him.

"Brianna, please, let me explain." He said, getting down from the Titan's neck. "I-"

"NO!" Eren froze mid-step as Brianna shouted, stiffening her sword arm again. "S'ay 'way 'rom me Eren!"

Raising his hands, Eren tried to pacify her. "Please let explain."

"'here is no 'xplainin' to be had" Her voice began to fade again. "You 'ried t' kill me."

"No, I... it wasn't me. I lost control and-"

She cut him off again, but just barely. She was waning; her sword had fallen from her grip, the wind almost stole her voice away. "You're a mons'er Eren, a Ti'an."

Her body was shaken by a fit of bloody coughs, cutting off anything else she might have said, before she collapsed, wheezing. Eren ran to her, unworried by the fact that she had been threatening him just a few seconds ago, weakly as it was. Pulling her head out of the pool of blood forming around her, he patted the side of her face. "Come on Brianna, stay with me, please!"

Still conscious, she turned her head to face him. It was a mess of red and brown anger, all directed at him. "Go die, Ti'an scum." She finished with a bloodied loogy aimed right at his face.

Wiping his face his face of the fluids, Eren missed the last release of air coming from her body. He definitely noticed that her body stopped moving however.

"No Brianna, please, don't die," he whispered in a brittle voice.

No response.

He listened closely, hoping to hear another gasp of breath.

Nothing.

He placed his fingers along her neck, feeling for a pulse.

Not a beat,

She was dead.

"I... did this. I killed her. I lost control... and I killed her. Am I really... a monster?"

Eren curled in on himself, still holding Brianna's head in his lap, and let out a pained. This wasn't supposed to happen; she wasn't supposed to die, not like this. She'd made it so far, she had a

chance, and he ruined it. Why did he have to ruin it? Why couldn't he control the Titan?

Getting up after period of time he wasn't entirely aware of, he hefted Brianna's corpse over the trunk of the tree and laid her down. He straightened her body, crossed her arms, and shut her eyes, giving Brianna her final peace.

"I'm sorry Brianna You didn't deserve this, falling at the hands of a comrade. May your spirit find eternal peace and freedom beyond the Walls." After that, Eren began the long process of carrying stones from the streambed over to give her a proper grave; so few soldiers got that, dying in the line of duty.

At one point, Eren found the cloak he had been wearing before, lying on the ground. He set it aside until he had finished constructing the grave, at which point he set it over the stone tomb, wings side up. He weighed it down with her gear and her blades stuck in the corners of the cloth. With his blades, he carved out the letters R.I.P., followed beneath by her name, in the bark of the tree. Looking at it, Eren swallowed hard and walked away.

With nothing more he could do, he gathered his gear and returned to Babel. The animal seemed to know something was wrong when Eren returned.

"I'm sorry girl, she didn't make it," he said morosely, patting her on the nose. She just grunted in response. Untying her and mounting up, Eren steered her around. "Let's go. The sun's setting. We need to get to that depot before it comes back up. Hi-yah!"

A kick to the ribs sent Babel trotting away from the site, a grisly one, where a number of decaying skeletons led to a large blood splatter, almost blotted out by matching light of the setting sun, and just beyond that, a tomb: a tomb to someone who almost beat the odds, but in the end was still a tomb. It too was showered in the bloody glow, almost of if its occupant was bleeding out through gaps of the stone. It was hard for Eren to look at.



He wished to forget this place, but knew he should not. People needed to remember the fallen, for what purpose did they live if no one remembered their end and what they stood for at that moment.

*" Their memories will guide you," he heard his father's voice ring in his mind.*

Flashes of memory ran through his mind. The key, the needle, his father crying as he told him to get to the basement, that it had all the answers, and then a flash of light.

This was the second time those memories hit him. This time he was able to make some sense of them, start questioning what he remembered.

Was it his father that turned him into a Titan? Why would he do that? How did he do that to him? Did he know what would happen as a result? Why wasn't he here now?

The last one was something he had always wondered, but it was an even more pressing question now, amongst so many others he barely had together in his head. He had so very few answers.

This much Eren did know though: his father probably tuned him into... whatever it was he was, he wasn't strong enough to subdue the monster within him, and the answers to everything else probably lied at home, in the basement.

"You better hope I find those answers before I find you Dad, or else there's going to be hell to pay," he muttered angrily.

As much as he wished to head straight for Shiganshina and find the answers to all his questions though, he knew that he wasn't ready. He may have been 5th amongst the trainees, but he was still taken off guard by the one Titan and eaten by the other when he saved Armin back in Trost. He was just still too green, despite living out here for over two weeks now. On top of that, if he had to transform without dropping his gear, he'd most certainly lose it. He was

currently sans jacket from that last bout, and the two canteens he hadn't given Brianna were gone as well. If that happened, and Babel wasn't nearby when he emerged from the Titan, he'd be stranded, which would certainly mean death for him in Titan infested Shiganshina.

And the Titan form itself.

Eren wasn't sure if he could get it under control, but as loath as he was to admit it, he would never know if he didn't try.

That unfortunately meant he would have to transform, often, in order to gain a greater handle on this power, so that if another situation like that were to occur, the results wouldn't end the same. If he couldn't do that, well it was almost impossible for there to be any survivors living in Shiganshina at this point. He just needed to be able to fight off the other Titans.

All this meant that he would return to the forest, to that site, to train himself for the day he returned home. When he got the answers that were in his basement... He didn't know what he'd do then.

Would he stay out here, continuing to steal supplies off the military while using what he learned to help kill Titans until he died?

Or would he return to the Walls, with the risk of being killed by the military, in order to share what he found with them in hopes it would help see humanity freed from the Titans. Would he then be able to see Armin and Mikasa again?

If anyone would see him as Eren, it would be what was left of his family.

'Funny I'm thinking that, with scene I made yelling at Mikasa to stop treating me like a kid brother before Trost,' he thought, tugging on the scarf that thankfully did not vaporize. 'I shouldn't have been so angry with her all the time. I just wanted her to focus on herself, just

so she wouldn't die. It'd be hard to live knowing she died trying to protect me.'

He paused, letting the thought seep in a bit as Babel continued galloping forward into the night.

'I miss Mikasa.'

End

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S.N.: Yay, MikEren feels at the end there! If that's not enough for you, I'll let you know the two went looking for one of Levi's broom closets not too long ago, so just imagine that. \*reels in rod only to find a human Rod at the end, and tosses him back as far away from the Wall as possible\* I truly am sorry to those I promised more to, but if I waited to write all that out too, this chapter would be like 15,000 words and would take another month or so to publish. I have been in a writing mood recently though, so maybe next chapter will be out in a month? School sucks though, so yeah. As it stands, next chapter should be all 104th kids in the Survey Corp, with a possible visitation to the MP for our two favorite wall breakers. Then we'll time skip to the 57th Expedition, and maybe the moment you've all been waiting for... or maybe not, we'll see. Until next chapter everyone, ta-ta.

## Chapter 8

S.N.: Yo everyone, this is the last chapter before we travel beyond the Walls with the Survey Corps! Anyone else excited, cause I know I am! Before we do that though, we're going hit everyone in the 104th and the Survey Corps as promised. Fun fact before we start though, someone calculated the dates from the events after Trost to the present time in the manga, and it's only been about 4 months 5 days since Eren first transformed as of chapter 70, which jumped two months all on its own. Like shit went down really fast in the SnK universe. Anyway, I'm happy with response I received with the last chapter and I hope you all feel the same way about this chapter too. I apologize for the wait, but finals and life have demanded my attention first. To make up for it though, here's over 9000 words of story. Now with that, let us begin the eighth chapter of "The Rogue Titan".

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Year 850, Day 36 after the Breach of Trost District, 2 weeks until the 57th Expedition

"Armin, if you would do the honors?" The shorter blonde held the trigger in his fist, thumb over the button. "On my mark; three, two, one, fire!" Armin's thumb pressed the button, and not a second later a series of explosions could be heard throughout the forest.

In front of them a wooden 15 meter Titan mannequin was pierced by a number of barbed hooks, all wired back into a large weighted casing resembling a barrel on wheels.

"Looks like we've finally eliminated that delay between the spark and detonation," Armin commented, a smile gracing his face as he looked at their handiwork. Further into the forest were other setups similar to this one.

"Indeed, the squad leader's going to be very pleased we finally got this operating to her expectations." Moblit stepped to the front of the casing and gave one of the wires a good pull. "We'll need to do a few more tests, but I imagine that if they give us a repeat performance, we should be able to field them during the next expedition. Perfect timing too, since those last two expired during the last round of experimentation."

"Do you really think this thing can catch and hold a Deviant Class?" he asked.

"The Squad Leader thinks they can, so long as we deploy several at once, and she's yet to be proven wrong when it comes to her equipment, so yes, I do." Moblit smiled as patted the device for emphasis.

"It sounds like you really admire her," Armin stated, stepping forward to place the detonator on the side hook of the contraption.

Moblit let out a pleased sigh and looked up, reminiscing in something. "I do. There's still so much we don't know about the Titans and the outside world, but since she's become head of research in the Corps, we've learned more about the Titans in the past five years than we have in the prior fifty. It's an honor she sees me as capable to be her second." He leaned against the wood, easing the weight off his feet. Armin followed his example. "It really helps that she's such a compassionate person too. I'm glad she counts me among her friends."

"If I didn't know better, I would say you had more than admiration for her," Armin ribbed, the implication obvious in his tone.

"Heh, well glad to know you're smart enough to see otherwise," Moblit chuckled, turning his head to look at Armin. "In truth, I don't understand what those feelings are, when most of the soldiers talk of a significant other. I get the commitment and desire to protect someone; I feel that for Hanji and the rest of our squad, but that other stuff..." He shrugged with an indifferent hum. A moment of

silence passed between the two before Moblit pushed forward and began walking to the castle. "Let's go Armin; we should report our results to the Squad Leader." The young genius nodded and moved to follow.

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"Let's go, let's go, come on Jean, you can do it!" Hanji shouted from in front of him, running backwards.

"Easy \*huff\* for you \*huff\* to say!" Jean got out between breaths, wincing with every other step.. He was now accustomed enough with his new leg that they were able to reacquaint him with the rigorous training of the military. However, almost a month out of the field had left him fairly out of shape. It didn't do him any favors that Hanji threw a fifty kilo pack on his back.

"It is, but it's not me who's recovering right now. We're here to see you back into top condition for the next expedition in two weeks."

Jean just groaned. 'Out of frying pan and into the fire, Jean.'

"Come on, just a bit more and we can head back to HQ." Hanji ducked under a branch Jean swore she could not have seen, only to nearly run into it himself. He just groaned in response. "There we go." Surprisingly she managed to put on a burst of speed and pull further ahead of him.

'That's it, that confirms it, she's definitely out of her mind.' His legs, or what remained of them, were burning from the effort. He felt he was about to collapse when Hanji stopped abruptly. Since she stopped, he followed suit and collapsed onto his hands and knees.

"Ah Moblit, we were just heading back to HQ. I'm guessing you and Armin finished today's tests," Jean heard. Looking up he saw Hanji conversing with the aforementioned men, though neither of them could get much of a word in edgewise after initially reporting the success of the trials. Armin eventually decided to slink away over to Jean.

"How goes Hanji's training sessions?" Armin offered Jean a hand. Claspng it, Jean was pulled to his feet again.

"Grueling." He reached for the canteen in his jacket pocket and swallowed what remained of its contents. "But necessary I guess," he exhaled. Armin nodded.

"What are you carrying in that pack anyways?" Jean unslung his bag. Hanji was walking away with Moblit, so training was probably over now. Opening the top, he pulled out some of its contents.

"Castle stones. One of the exterior walls is partially collapsed, and Hanji decided to have me haul at least 50 kilos of them during our routine." He began pulling more out of the pack, leaving them to the side.

"Won't you get in trouble with Hanji for that. I'm pretty sure she'd want you to carry those back to the castle," he stated, not making any move to stop him.

"I doubt it. You've seen her when she goes off on something, and I'm pretty sure you and Moblit did just that." He gestured to Hanji walking away with Moblit, raising her voice and making some wild hand gestures while he just nodded along. "I can grab some new ones back at HQ before she notices."

"You shouldn't cut your training short like that."

Jean just waved him off. "I'll be fine, I've been at this for hours. Fifteen minutes won't make a huge difference." He returned to his feet. "Come on, let's head back now. I'm sure dinner's about to be served."

A low rumbling was heard coming from Armin's stomach, causing him to rub his head in embarrassment. "Guess I could use a meal now." Jean laughed, and the two trailed behind Hanji and Moblit back to the Survey Corps HQ.

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'Left, right, left, duck and sweep.' The sound of a body hitting the floor reverberated through the training room. A short, scarred woman with piercing blue eyes and shortly shorn blond hair stood in an open stance, breathing heavily from exertion.

"Damn, that's the fifth time today you've knocked me flat on my ass," Ymir said from the ground, rubbing her sore rear as she pulled herself onto her knees. "Think I'm starting to bruise."

"Sorry Ymir, I-" started, but was cut off.

"Don't be, means you're improving." The corner of her lips tipped upwards in her trademark smirk. "I might actually have to catch up with you some day. Until then," Ymir's legs shot out like cables, sweeping Krista's legs out from under her, "you need to work on staying focused."

Reacting to the sudden loss of footing, Krista's training with 3DMG kicked in. The muscles in her torso flexed, starting her into a roll that would take some of the momentum away from her fall. It carried her from where she hit the ground into a crouching position about a meter over, outside of Ymir's reach.

Arms up, Krista was ready when Ymir popped up in a matching stance. The two began circling each other, not a word passing between them as they traded light blows with each other, testing each other's guard for openings to exploit.

Krista saw one when Ymir lifted her arms a bit too high, and moved in to deliver a swift round kick to her left side. She felt the satisfying force of a hit, but when she tried to set her leg down Ymir hooked her arm around Krista's leg, holding it in place with a pained grin.

'Has Ymir ever dropped that look,' Krista thought as he tried to free her leg. Given Ymir's stature, she was just out of reach of Ymir's fists in this position, but she was well within Ymir's. As expected, the freckled brunette aimed a hook with her free hand at Krista's head, which she handily blocked with both arms.



Pulling a page from her sparring partner, Krista grabbed her arm before she could retract it and pulled her forward, ducking down onto her other knee. This threw the woman off-balance, freeing Krista's leg from her grip and enabling Krista to push her left shoulder forward into Ymir's gut. Having let go of Ymir's arm, she clasped her wrists around Ymir's thighs before pushing her upwards, letting their combined momentum throw them back.

Feeling what was about to happen next, Ymir tucked her head as far in as she could before hitting the ground. The breath was knocked right out of her lungs as she landed on her upper back, just as Krista landed on top of her, smashing her head onto the floor.

The tiny blond wasted no time with her downed opponent, rolling off and to her left, then swinging a leg over Ymir's torso, mounting the tall snarker. She clasped the brunette's wrists in her gloved hands, leaning her body forward to hold them down.

Ymir opened her eyes to see what a few would consider the gaze of a goddess scorned bearing down on her. Since she started training with Krista after she was cleared by medical, it was as though another person had taken over Krista's body. She was powerful, fierce, and a bit brutal, nothing like the sweetheart she was in training.

"I give," Ymir yielded monotonously.

And like that the goddess of war was gone, leaving the old Krista in its wake. The tiny blond smiled with a hum of satisfaction as she got off Ymir and stood up. She just pushed herself onto her elbows.

"Nice throw there, didn't think you'd pull something like that," she stated, snark ever present in her voice.

"Well you did say I needed to fight with my size, not against it. Keeping that in mind, the rest just... happened." Krista hesitated on the last word.

Ymir frowned. She didn't have much to go on, but something in her gut wanted to say it was Historia that was fighting, not Krista. It was weird, since from what she had heard while sneaking around the interior was that Historia chose to be Krista, but maybe there was more to it? She didn't know enough to say one way or the other. As long as Krista could keep herself alive, they were good. She could figure the rest of that out later.

She let out a sigh, before giving a small smile. "You're telling me you're so good you don't need to think anymore? Guess you don't need me," she exclaimed with a bit of sarcasm, looking away dejectedly.

"Yes, I-I m-mean no I do-" she stuttered.

"Relax, I'm teasing. Come on, help me up." The freckled brunette smiled as she reached a hand out. Krista obliged, clasping Ymir's hand in her own gloved one and pulled her to her feet. "I see you're getting used to the crazy lady's fingers. You really knew how to hit me with them." Krista just nodded at this, looking down at her gloved hands.

Several of her fingers were badly mangled after crashing in Trost, and unfortunately couldn't be saved. Thankfully, after her arms had healed, that Hanji lady had offered her a way to cope with the damage.

Soldiers had lost digits in the past during training and on expeditions, and while it wasn't the most debilitating of conditions, it was a significant inconvenience to work and life in general. The previous Head of Research in the Corps had apparently created gloves within which artificial fingers could be installed. With some wires running through the cloth back to the base, they could be moved with the movement of her wrists. They weren't nearly as strong as her remaining digits, but they helped.

"Come on," Ymir started, shaking Krista back to the present by wrapping her arm around her shoulders, "let's get some grub, okay."

"Yeah, sounds good," she smiled back.

'How lucky am I that she still has that smile,' Ymir thought. When Krista was fighting, when she was what she suspected to be Historia, she never smiled. It was a scary thought imagining Krista without her usual cheer. That she still smiled was the one thing Ymir was truly thankful for, after Krista still being alive. She could have changed for the worst after Trost, but no, Krista was still Krista.

Making their way through the castle's hallways, the duo stumbled upon Sasha and Connie grumbling about stupid midgets as they cleaned one of the castle's many rooms

"What are you two doing?" Ymir asked dully, stepping into the room.

Connie jumped, having not seen them come in, and began to dust frantically.

"It's okay Connie, it's just Ymir. The midget isn't going to hurt you again." Sasha placed a hand on his shoulder to calm him down.

"What happened?" Krista asked, legitimately concerned for their well-being.

"Isn't it obvious? They got in trouble again," Ymir stated, amused at what could have landed these two in this situation.

"We may have gotten a bit hungry between meals today," Sasha started, poking her index fingers together, facing the two women.

"So we may have skipped part of training to head to the mess," Connie continued, cleaning at a less frantic speed.

"Only no one was serving so..." Sasha looked up to the side, trying to avoid eye contact.

"We may have..."

"Possibly..."

"Tried to..."

"Kind of..."

"Maybe..."

"Sneak into..."

"The provisions closet..."

"Only it was already occupied..."

"By a midget getting some goddamn tea!" Connie yelled, only to shove his fist in his mouth on realizing how loudly he yelled.

"Who grabbed us and decided to throw us into suplex." Sasha rubbed the back of her head, where Krista thought she saw a lump.

"And now we have to clean every room along this corridor before we can return to the barracks with no supper." Connie moped. "Stupid midget," he muttered.

Krista could only sigh and shake her head, while Ymir was unabashedly laughing at the situation these two had gotten themselves into, surprised this hadn't happened sooner.

"I'll see if I can get you two some bread?" Krista wasn't so sure if this was a good idea, but knowing the bad decisions these two were prone to make when they were hungry, especially Sasha, it might be best not to leave them to their own devices.

Sasha suddenly prostrated herself before the tiny blond. "You truly are a Goddess, aren't you Krista? Thank you!" This only caused Ymir clutch her stomach as she began to laugh even harder.

"Come on Sasha, I can't do this all by myself!" Connie yelled from a corner of the room. She got up off the ground and grabbed the duster she dropped, quickly returning to what she had been doing before the couple interrupted them.

With nothing more to be said, the two left Sasha and Connie to their fate and continued on their way to the mess.

"Hey Krista," Ymir started once her laughter died down, "if you're a Goddess, does that make me your high priestess?"

"Ymir," was all Krista could say, embarrassed. She began to blush, while Ymir cracked the biggest shit-eating she could.

"Come on, someone's got to spread the good word, right?" she ribbed on, causing Krista to shrink out of embarrassment. Laughing at her expense, Ymir pulled Krista into a one armed hug, "This is one of the reasons I have to marry you." The poor blonde was now redder than the roses on the Garrison's uniforms. Ymir's revelry at her Goddess' expense lasted the rest of the way to the mess.

Upon entering, they were noticed by Armin, who was currently conversing with Jean. He waved them down to get their attention, to which Krista responded by pulling her head out of her collar and returned the wave. Grabbing a couple of loaves and bowls of vegetable stew from the side, the Goddess and her Priestess joined the two at their table.

The two men were sitting across from each other, but rather than split apart, Ymir decided to sit herself on the bench with Armin and Christa. Jean raised an eyebrow at this, to which Ymir responded with a challenging glare saying 'are you going to do something about it?'

He didn't, just shrugging it off as Ymir being Ymir, and returned his attention back between his soup and the bowl-cut blond.

"I get that we can catch a Titan, but why is what I'm asking? We already know their nape is the weak spot and they kill us for sport; not much else to it," Jean said lackadaisically, sipping his water.

"But there is Jean. You remember back in training we learned how Titan activity decreases over night!"

"O-of course I do, everyone knows that," he boasted, unconvincingly.

"Yes, it is fairly common knowledge in the military; however we didn't know if they went completely dormant or at what rate they did such, at least not until Captain Hanji began tests on captured Titans."

"Great, so we know when the Titans decide to take a nap, I don't see how that'll help us. It's not like we can go flying out swords ready when we can't even see our hands in front of our faces," Ymir put out rather bluntly, leaning her chin on her fist to face him. This comment earned her a small elbow in the gut from .

Turning to face her, Armin sighed. "Just because we can't do anything with it now doesn't mean it won't be useful in the future. Besides, that's only one thing Moblit told me the researchers have been working on while we were working on the latest Titan capturing device."

"How do you capture a Titan?" Krista piped in, genuinely curious. Armin smiled at his fellow blonde's curiosity while Jean face palmed, having already listened to this for the past hour. Ymir just began to stuff her face.

"Well the new method we're working on utilizes a number of hooked cables launched from weighted housings in a similar fashion to our gear, digging into the Titan's flesh that once they healed they would be difficult to remove. However the old- oh, hey Marco." Armin stopped mid-sentence to greet his fellow trainee as he plopped into a spot next to Jean.

"Hey Armin, Krista, Ymir, Jean," the freckled boy exhaled, trying to maintain a polite demeanor as he greeted everyone with a tired smile and settled in.

"You okay Marco? You look like you just wrestled a Titan. What kind of drills did that Mike guy run you through today?" Jean asked, concerned for go-getter.

"You don't want to know," he exhaled, picking up his cup and emptying half its contents in one go. He let out a loud content sigh before face-planting onto the table, arms rag-dolling below the table. "Oh, so cool, I really needed that," he groaned out in pain

The others were taken aback by this display, Jean more so than others. He would be lying if he said he wasn't a little scared of the mountain of a man known as Mike Zacharius. The man was taller than Bertholdt and more muscled than Reiner, and looked as though he could squish anyone in the Survey Corps and not bat an eye, which was saying something considering how grizzled some of the veterans were. The hell he probably put his squad through, he felt for Marco.

He placed his hand on his buddy's shoulder and started patting him out of empathy. "It's okay Marco, its okay." The freckled man hummed in satisfied acknowledgement of the gesture before losing awareness of his surrounding, focused only on the cool feeling of the table.

"T's not like we're learning how to walk or anything." Jean heard the tall woman mumble through a swig of her glass.

"You say something?" Jean glared at Ymir, unamused at her comment.

"Me? No. You must've hit your head again," she said, hand over her chest in mock offense.

"I did not hit my head and I know you definitely said something." Jean's temper was quickly running short.

"Well I didn't say it out loud, so you shouldn't be concerned," she bit back, giving Jean her attention.

"You sure said it loud enough to concern me, asshole."

"Okay, I'm sorry for making an obvious observation then," she apologized in the most insincere manner possible, giving up any false pretense at this point.

"If you're so sorry, maybe you should shut up then," he shot back.

It was then that the blondes decided to play intervention before things escalate from words to fists.

"So Krista, how's your training been going?" Armin asked loudly, diverting Ymir and Jean's attention from each other for a bit.

"It's-"

"Let me tell you something Blondie, the instructors messed something up with the ranking of us rookies," Ymir cut in. She pulled Krista into another tight side hug and pointed at her with her other hand, tipping her cup towards her girl. "The way Krista's been fighting after recovery, she should have been the #1 rookie over Mikasa."

Once again the poor blonde shrunk in embarrassment wit quiet "Ymir" at the woman's antics.

"How're the gloves," Armin directed again towards .

"They're okay," she replied quietly. "It feels weird though." She peered down at the brown leather encompassing her hands.

"You can still feel them, can't you," Jean sympathized, rubbing his prosthetic, still expecting his real leg to still be there. Krista nodded affirmatively, clenching her hands into a fist. Several digits, the middle rightward on her right and the ring and pointer on her left, did not close completely. "Hanji calls them phantom limbs, though I guess in your case they'd be phantom finger." Jean chuckled darkly.

"What's so funny Jean." Marco finally had enough energy to turn his head and pay attention to the conversation.



"I'm just imagining the ghost of my leg chilling out in the afterlife waiting for the rest of me to join it. Sorry leg, I'm not planning on joining you anytime soon!" His voice became louder with that last sentence as his chuckling turned into full blown laughter, which was followed by Krista, imagining her own fingers doing the same, and Marco, too tired to make sense of anything and just went along with it, joining in. Ymir and Armin just stared at each other, confused at how these three could be laughing at something so morbid.

Eventually the laughter died down, and the three could speak again.

"Hey, speaking of Mikasa, has anyone seen her at all? I haven't been able to catch her since we arrived." Everyone shook their heads at Jean's query. She had practically disappeared since joining the Special Operations squad, save for Armin, who had the layout of the castle memorized the day after move in.

'I really hope she's okay,' Armin thought. Things weren't the same since Trost; they lost a good friend in Eren. He was his best friend, the only person besides his Grandfather who looked out for him when they were kids, at least until Mikasa joined them. Losing Eren was a serious blow. Armin knew that joining the military might shorten their lives, especially if they joined the Survey Corps, but he didn't expect it to be that short. It terrified him if he thought too much about it, which was why he pushed to work with the Corps team of researchers and scientists as hard as he did; the work occupied his mind with other thoughts.

As much as he hurt though, he could see losing Eren cut straight into the core of Mikasa's being. He tried reaching out to her many times since Trost, share in their mutual grief whenever he ran into her, in hopes to recover from their loss together, but she had closed herself off almost completely to the world. He was worried for her well-being, but he couldn't do anything unless she returned the gesture.

"I'm sure she's doing fine wherever she is," he lied. He hoped he wasn't.

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"Come on Ackerman, you're number one, ain't ya," Auruo shouted, passing the woman overhead to grab the practice kill. "Act like it!" He darted away, searching for the next target.

'Stupid kid's gonna get us killed if she doesn't stay sharp,' Auruo sighed mentally.

The kid was good, really good, definitely better than any of the squad when they first signed up. But that was only when she was clear headed.

Looking to his left, he saw Petra just as she landed a killing blow on the dummy with Gunther acting as distraction.

When Mikasa first joined, he honestly didn't know what they were going to do with her. She didn't seem to respond to external stimuli very well for the first couple of days with the squad. In all honesty, had the charade kept up he would have gone straight to Erwin and demanded her removal from their squad. Gunther had looked as though he was planning the same thing, and at one point they discussed the matter with each other. Petra stepped in on them though and put a stop to that. She had other plans to deal with their Ackerman-situation, which in hindsight Auruo agreed was a much more effective way to go about this than what he planned.

'Walls she's such a good soul.'

---

*Year 850, Day 15 after the Breach of Trost District, 5 days after induction into the Survey Corps*

*Auruo was heading back to the team's shared bunk in the barracks. He had just had his weekly bath, as required by Levi for his team. Approaching the door to their room, he heard Petra talking inside with someone. The door was ajar, and curiosity overtook decency in the moment as he decided to peek in.*

*Inside he saw Petra and Mikasa out of uniform, Petra sitting crossed legged facing Mikasa while Mikasa, had knees pulled into her chest, on Eld's... Mikasa's bunk. Mikasa's face looked red and streaked with dried tear marks, while Petra had what he figured to be a consoling hand on her shoulder. Whatever had been eating at her must have finally broken through.*

*" I gave up Petra. I just sat there in the alleyway, waiting for a Titan to kill me." He could hear Mikasa's voice shaking through her breaths. Looking closely he could see her trembling slightly, not without good reason from what he just heard.*

*" And yet you're here. Something must have changed in that last second" Petra said softly. The younger women nodded weakly.*

*From this angle he couldn't see her face, but he couldn't imagine the look of sympathy Petra was giving Mikasa*

*" So what happened?" Petra moved closer to Mikasa, hoping her presence would help calm her mind enough share her story.*

*Mikasa took a shaky deep breath, in... and out, before speaking again. She was quieter this time, almost a whisper, but Auruo still managed to pick up what she was saying.*

*" I-I remembered Eren."*

*" The friend you lost?" Petra asked, confirming who she was talking about.*

*" Mm-hm," she nodded. "He," she swallowed, "he would n-never forgive me if I gave up, if I s-stopped fighting. So I got up, f-fought back."*

*" But you said your gear was busted. How'd you manage to kill it?" The slight tilt in her head signaled she was genuinely curious as to how she Mikasa escaped. Auruo was extremely curious as well.*

*Anyone who could escape a Titan on foot was worthy of a great amount of respect.*

*" I didn't. T-that Titan-person showed up. It killed the other one and moved on j-just as Armin and Connie showed up and got m-me out of that alley, b-brought me back. It- he saved me. He had every chance to kill me, b-but went after the other Titans instead." Her voice was shaky, yet managed to maintain a low volume.*

*" I see." To Auruo it was quite obvious Petra was skeptical of this claim. He was too. Never had there been a Titan that ignored a human in favor to kill other Titans, it just wasn't a thing that happened. And the possibility that one was actually a human, it was unbelievable. Yet the Captain and Hanji both attested to the validity in the post-mission report.*

*"B-but I couldn't save him either. He saved all of us, but I left him like I... like I left Eren, and now both are dead." What began quietly ended sounding extremely distressed, as Mikasa began tearing up again. Auruo looked away, having at least the decency to not watch her as she cried while he was peeping in.*

*'Why in the Walls is she crying over a Titan though?' Auruo just couldn't wrap his mind around the idea of "good" Titan, let alone someone who would care about one.*

*"You sound like you knew who he was." Surprisingly for Auruo, Petra schooled her tone, keeping any preconceived ideas, no matter how justified, from showing through.*

*Mikasa shook her head again, lips pursed. "I did feel something... good in him, something familiar. Whoever was in there wanted to help us; help humanity! But no, I didn't know them." She rubbed her face dry with the white sleeve of her shirt.*

*"Mikasa, I won't say I understand how you're feeling." Mikasa's head jerked up to face Petra, fresh tears still running down her face. "It would be insincere, and would only serve to hurt you further. But*

*everyone in the Survey Corps has lost friends and comrades, we understand how it feels to lose people. We lost our squad mate Eld back in the battle Trost."*

*Auruo shook his head at the memory of Eld. Hanji came to them a few days ago while cleanup was still underway with his severed head, apologizing profusely. She kept saying how she let her research distract her, and how it cost Eld's life.*

*"I'm sorry." Mikasa muttered, returning her head on her knees.*

*"Don't be, it's not your fault Mikasa." Petra's voice began to take a firmer tone. "The point is that none of what's happened is your fault, same as it's not mine or anyone else's fault. In this world we live in, those who fight the Titans die earlier than anyone else. Your friend Eren and... whoever the Titan was, gave their lives fighting, in hopes that one day humanity can live without fearing of the Titans. Don't dwell on losses you can't control, but remember that they fought for a just cause, the same cause you are fighting for now." She moved her hand from Mikasa's shoulder to her arm, gripping it in a comforting gesture.*

*That was the same thing Captain Levi had said to Hanji to calm her down. Auruo couldn't believe Petra was saying that about a Titan though, but she was always been the best in the squad at speaking with others. That was why Levi always had her on courier duty when he needed a message sent. If anyone could speak well of one of those monsters, Petra could, if only for Mikasa's sake.*

*" Petra," Mikasa unclasped her hands and placed one over Petra's comforting one, squeezing it, "thank you." She pulled the redheaded woman into a tight hug, shocking her before she settled in to return the comforting gesture.*

*Auruo could see a ghost of a smile on her face. It didn't entirely reach her eyes, but there was something a bit different in how she held herself. 'Woah, she's almost as pretty as Petra,' Auruo thought. This was the first time he'd seen her with a look beyond her normal*

*depressed-stoic expression, and it was a pleasant surprise. It gave him hope that things would be different now than from the past couple of days. Maybe she'd smile like that again in the future.*

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## Present

Things did change after Petra's talk. Mikasa interacted with the squad in the following days, and on a couple of instances Auruo swore he saw her lips tick up, usually at his own expense at Petra's hand. Still though, there were times where she began to relapse. Petra enlisted Gunther's help to keep her going, and eventually she'd come back from her depression, but it wasn't always a quick resolution as it had been that first time.

Now was such a period of time, when she was less attentive during training and in general. Hopefully he'd snapped her back to reality though.

Coming up on pair of targets, he heard the whooshing of gas pass overhead. Mikasa flew right over him, free falling forward in an untethered roll. "Auruo, maneuver 12, go!" she shouted as she flew between the cutouts.

Tethering to a tree off to the side, Auruo, swung around the cutouts and sliced the nape of one. Across the way he could see Gunther taking out the other cutout.

'Looks like someone's got their head back in the game.' In the distance he could already see Mikasa take out one-two-three cutouts in a single maneuver. He had to hand it to her, when she was in the zone she gave them all a run for their money.

"Alright everybody, wrap it up. Erwin wants to talk strategy for the next expedition." Levi stepped into a clearing with his ever stoic face; Auruo swore that if he didn't know better, he might be related to Mikasa.

He shook his head at such a ridiculous thought, and rode his tethers back to the ground. Looking up, the sky was turning orange with the setting sun. It had been a nice day today, one of the first days of the summer season. In the distance, he could see a bird flying across the sky.

'Fly little guy, fly free on your wings. I'll be sure to do the same on mine.'

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"There we go," Annie uttered as she tied the letter shut. "Get this letter to Bertholdt and Reiner, Victor." She opened the window to the study and out went the messenger hawk.

Word from Reiner and Bertholdt in the interior had made Annie somewhat pleased she hadn't joined the Military Police. While training with the Corps was intense, especially under Captain Mike, apparently the MP officers were pushing all the work onto the trainees while they were "gambling their wages away in a drunken stupor," as Reiner put it. "With the work Bert and I have been pulling to keep everything going, we might as well be officers ourselves." It was quite obvious he wasn't pleased with his lot.

He did seem to be earning the respect of the other trainees though, if his word was to be trusted, by providing a source of authority they could count on. She had to admit, if only to herself, that Reiner was a very charismatic figure. He knew how to work and work with people. That was very good for them. If they could gather allies within the Walls, that could potentially make accomplishing their mission that much easier. The sooner they accomplished it, the sooner they could go home.

Returning to the desk she had been using, she grabbed the boys' letter along with her left over supplies: a candle with matches, a roll of string, several quills, an ink well, a sauce pan, and her ring, blade still extended.

It took a lot of willpower to keep herself from shifting when she used the ring. An empty head, clear of any sort of goal, was draining. Doing so multiple times in the span of an hour, when she was trying to write, had left her on the verge of passing out in her seat. If she were to fall asleep though, people would ask questions in regards to her whereabouts, or worse yet as to why she had these items if she was found. She just needed to get back to the barracks, then she could rest.

Picking up the saucepan, she was pleased to see not a drop of her blood remained, having all been used or evaporated. 'Couldn't ask for better invisible ink if I tried.'

Hopefully no one would see their letter before it got to Bert and Reiner. If someone did though, they'd only see a simple correspondence between acquaintances from the 104th. That's if they remembered to dispose of the letter immediately after they read it; which reminded her.

Striking one of the unused matches, Annie relit the candle on the table. Grabbing the correspondence by one of the corners, she dipped it into the fire, setting it aflame. She watched the paper burn as one would watch clouds pass overhead, passively and only the faintest of interest. She could feel the fire reach the last bits of paper; it burnt the ends of her fingers, but she didn't care. Without any more fuel, the fire died, the ashes it left falling into a small pile on the wooden surface, the faintest traces of smoke could be seen rising and intermingling with the steam from her healing fingertips, both fading away after a few seconds.

Crouching slightly, Annie took a deep breath and blew the candle out and the ashes away. Stuffing the warm wax stick into a pocket with everything else, she began trudging back to her bed. Passively, she began thumbing the one item she hadn't stowed away, the ring on her left hand, the one she was given by her father.

'So long as I wear this ring, I can fight,' was what she had been taught before leaving. She believed Bert and Reiner rings similar to



hers, as she was told it was village tradition, though for reasons she didn't quite understand she had yet to see them wear theirs'.

She thought of how easy it would be to for her to transform and kill everyone in the castle. It would be almost too easy. 'But that's being cocky, and cocky gets you killed.' She wasn't thinking of actually doing it, it would blow her cover and the mission ruined if she did that.

She also found herself kind of caring bit for her fellow trainees of the 104th. She did suffer three years under Shadis with them after all, it would hard not to become fond of them. She didn't want to kill them.

That didn't mean she wouldn't if she had to though.

Rounding a familiar corner, her thoughts took a more positive turn. They knew who the coordinate was: Eren Jaeger. He was outside human occupied territory, so casualties would be minimal in their attempts to retrieve him. Not only that, but knowing the suicidal idiot's sheer determination and will to live, she was certain he was alive somewhere out there. Whether he was trapped in is Titan body, that didn't entirely matter, so long as they got the coordinate ability, though if Annie were honest with herself she would prefer Eren to remain lucid. If recovering the ability failed though, then they would have to go with their other objective.

'Don't even want to think about that.'

Eventually she came to the room she was bunked in. Unsurprisingly it was currently unoccupied, given the fact that the sun was only just setting. Removing her belts and throwing off her jacket and sweater, she rolled into her bed, almost immediately passing out. One final thought passed through her mind as she nodded off.

'Stay alive Eren, for both our sakes.'

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"At the least you've got to admit night patrols are easier to deal with Marlo, if solely for the fact that they're cooler than during the day," Reiner said to the high bowl-cut boy.

"That certainly makes up for the lack of visibility when all of the dregs of society are up and about," Marlo replied dryly, glancing at couple of shady looking men staring back from an alleyway. Thankfully it wasn't just the two of them, but also Bertholdt, Hitch, and the rest of the top ten from the Northern 104th Trainee Squad.

"Not much worse than what's going on back at HQ," Reiner stated bitingly. Marlo couldn't make a decent comeback to that, dropping his shoulders in defeat, as it was unfortunately too true. The debauchery and illicit actions the officers participated in, Marlo would rather not think about it.

He originally wanted to join the Military Police thinking they were the paragons of the military and humanity, but as time went by we learned that they were actually some of the worst. Corrupt, lazy, and drunk, most would have changed their minds about joining if they knew the truth. Not Marlo though. It just made him want to join more, so that he could one day be the man who reformed the MP so as to match the image with which humanity perceives them.

He didn't realize how hard this task would be. The first week, where he had spoken up about protocol and regulation, had earned himself enough verbal lashings and beat-downs to last himself a while. Even drunk the officers were more skilled at hand to hand combat than he was.

Then Reiner stepped in. The man somehow knew just how to deal with the officers and shielded Marlo from further harm. Of course Reiner had to tell him, quite harshly, that the path he was currently on would only lead to pain and misery for himself and the other trainees, as opposed to the reforms he wished to make. It was quite obvious though that he held as much distaste, if not more so, than Marlo himself did for the current state of the Military Police. He was a kindred soul in his quest to change the MP.

Since then the giant muscled man became sort of a de facto leader for the trainees. He organized them for patrols, drills, and maintenance of HQ, which was sorely lacking beforehand. He spoke softly when help was needed, especially with the civilians they encountered along the streets of the interior, but he carried a really big stick when someone caused trouble, either within or without their squad, but his friend Bertholdt seemed able to keep him on the former course of action rather than the latter.

Such wasn't going to be tonight.

Rounding off onto the street bordering the canal, Marlo could see in the distance two men with the green unicorns on their shoulders talking to a third man holding an oil lamp on a gang plank to a barge. There were a couple of other men in the darkness moving crates about the deck. One was close enough to the light to see the side was emblazoned with the Military Police's sigil.

"Pleasure doing business with you men," the third figure said smugly, holding a small sack that jingled as it was passed to the first.

"Pleasure's the citizen's, not that they'll know this is where their tax money's going." The three figures shared a laugh.

"This'll certainly fetch a good amount of gold in the underground. Walls knows those degenerates love this stuff." The third figure spat into the canal, clearly disgusted with those that lived in the abandoned district. "The guns will also serve to help thin their numbers."

Marlo's blood began to boil at with what he was witnessing. These MP Officers were making a profit off through the selling government property to some black market dealer. He couldn't let this slide. As he made to unsling his musket he felt a large hand on his shoulder. Turning, he saw Reiner clasping his shoulder.

"Are we really going to let them get away with this?" he hissed, knowing if he spoke too loud there would be no way for justice to be

served. This was the best chance for them to do something to change the MP, bring the worst offenders to face their misdeeds. So far all he had done was maintenance and pursue some petty thieves.

Reiner just shook his head, before unslinging his own musket. "Alright everyone, you all just saw what just happened. Tell me, are you going to let that slide and be complicit to the Police Force's misdeeds, or will you take a stand, make a difference, earn the respect humanity thinks you deserve?" Marlo was surprised to hear something said so quietly carry so much power. Bert and, surprisingly, Hitch were the first two to unsling their guns, and were quickly followed by the rest, ready to take action.

A dozen armed men and women fresh out of boot camp wielding muskets against five unarmed men, Marlo like these odds. With this show of force they'd probably give up without the slightest resistance.

"Halt, you're under arrest," the big man's voice boomed as he aimed his musket at the figure walking up the plank. The men that had been on the deck were now on the street, frozen as they were carrying yet another crate, as guns were aimed at them as well.

"Easy their fellas, this is official MP Officer work," said the second soldier as he stepped away from the group. He looked like he hadn't shaven in a couple of days, but was definitely more sober than the others he had come to know. "This guy's, eh... he's just transporting gear to another section of us Military Police in the Walls." The man stepped back in shock when Marlo aimed his gun at him. His voice tone dropped as his face took a serious visage, "You can get into some serious trouble for pointing that at an officer."

"Like you two can for selling the property of the crown to smugglers?" Marlo retorted?

"Who's your commanding officer kid?" the other soldier asked. The man was more well-kept, and had a piercing gaze that was directed

straight at Marlo. Hitch had gun trained on him the moment he spoke up.

"Don't exactly know considering they're always too drunk to actually command," Hitch retorted. Marlo heard a couple of giggles behind him and saw Hitch grin. Stupid woman shouldn't be joking at a time like this.

The first one was now quite visibly angry, and began to speak again. "Now listen here-"

"Watch out!" Bert tackled Marlo to the ground as shots went off from the barge. He felt Bertholdt twitch as he screamed in pain. Looking down Marlo could see a bullet wound in the taller man's shoulder. Seeing his concern, Bert spoke through gritted teeth, "I'm fine, just take them down," and rolled off Marlo, grasping his shoulder.

He scrambled to his feet and began grasping for his musket, which had been knocked out of his hands as he hit the ground. Sighing in frustration when he was unable to find it, he looked up to see the situation had turned into a firefight.

Two people in their squad were down, with one tending to them while two others provided over watch for them.

One of the two men who had been carrying the crate in the street was down, slumped over the box while the second was wielding a knife and engaged with one of his squad members.

On the boat were two more men, one of whom was training his musket on the downed soldiers before firing. Whoever he was aiming at exactly, he missed, and in return was shot by one of the trainees watching over her downed comrades.

Reiner had boarded the boat after who could only be assumed as the captain and head smuggler, and was now grappling the man to the ground.

The first MP soldier had managed to wrestle away Hitch's musket, aiming it at her, but two other trainees had theirs' aimed at him.

And the second one-

"Oof!"

Tackled him onto the ground.

"How do you like that, you goody-two-shoes." He swung a punch at Marlo's face, which he managed to block, his arms still free. "You could have left us well enough alone. Now you're going to pay." The second one got through his guard and smashed into his jaw. "After we beat you to a pulp, we'll make sure your friends have some quality time with one of our holding cells before their meeting the firing squad." The third one got Marlo right in the nose. He could feel blood begin to drip as several more pelted his skull; it was almost certainly busted. "Except maybe a couple of those girls. Our buddy there's always asking about selling him one or two."

If Marlo's blood had been boiling before, it was steaming now. He began bucking his hips as hard as he can, trying to knock the man off, while sending whatever punches he could at the bastard.

"Aw, was someone hoping to get it in with someone? Well too bad, you probably aren't going to get it with anyone." Twisting his body, he aimed a punch between Marlo's legs.

The involuntary muscle spasm from the pain knocked the man off of him, but Marlo was unable to press the advantage.. It took a couple of deep breaths before Marlo rolled onto his knees and looked over to where the asshole should have been. He was prepared to return the beating with interest.

However, the man wasn't there anymore. Instead he was a ways away, running from the scene. Looking the other way Marlo saw the rest of the squad had seemed to have wrapped things up, the

smugglers restrained or too injured to move and the other Military Policeman lying on the ground, bleeding out.

Getting to his feet, he saw Hitch running up, musket in hand. "I got him," she shouted as she aimed down her sights, one eye closed in concentration.

She fired.

3..

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The fleeing soldier fell to the ground.

"Nice aim," Reiner said, patting the normally easy going blond on the shoulder. For a second Marlo thought that he saw steam coming off Reiner's head, but figured it was just the adrenaline and beating he got. Reiner probably just had his blood boiling from this situation too.

"I heard what he said," she hissed, the vitriol plain for anyone to see. It scared Marlo, never having seen his friend so truly pissed at someone.

"Understood. I'll go deal with him, you help wrap up things back here." He hustled off, rifle still ready and finger hovering over the trigger.

"You okay Marlo," Hitch turned to him, her voice losing the edge it had only a few seconds ago. "That bastard looked like he got you real good with that last punch."

Marlo spit out a globule of spit and blood, clearing his throat. "I'm fine. My nose is busted and I'll have a good bit of bruising, but the pain'll fade." He grabbed his nose, trying to feel for the break, then pulled his hand back before hissing in pain. There it was, high on the bridge. "How's everyone else?"

"Couple of gunshot wounds and Martin got sliced along his torso, but they're all wrapped. They'll have to visit medical, but nothing fatal thankfully," she replied, now using her musket as a stick to lean on. Ignoring that Hitch was probably damaging the end of the barrel, he continued.

"What about Bertholdt? He was shot right in the shoulder. Looked like it hit an artery."

Raising an eyebrow at this, Hitch replied lackadaisically. "Bert? Naw, he's fine, just a bullet hole in his uniform. It was close, but it passed right under his armpit." She made a wooshing motion under her one arm with her other hand.

That didn't make sense. He had seen the bullet wound and blood coming out of Bertholdt. "That's not right, I saw-"

The boom of a gunshot cut him off. Looking towards where Reiner was, the soldier Hitch shot was now slumped forward on his knees, Reiner's gun pointed at his head. The big man then slung his gun and bent over to throw the corpse over his shoulder.

"What the hell was that Reiner?" Marlo yelled as he rejoined the group. The rest of the trainees, Hitch included, just went slack jawed at what they just witnessed.

"Justice served." Reiner's face was a solemn façade as he uttered those two words.

"Justice served? How's that justice served," Marlo yelled. "Justice has a tribunal, jail time, reform! You just executed him!"

"Are there not crimes punishable by death?" Reiner postulated, confident in what he was saying.

"Well... yes but-"



"But what? You've saw what they were doing yourself, what they said they were going to do." He raised his voice for all the cadets to hear. "You've all seen it yourselves. The Military Police has been corrupted. If we go by their definition of "justice" it will be us in cells, not them. To trust their rules will be our end. But we... we decided to do right. We can make a difference! But that means doing things we may not like. If we can't make sacrifices though, then we can never see change." He placed the body down next to his comrade, now also dead, having taken two shots to the chest. "Leave now in silence and I won't ask any more from you. Stay with me, and as the soldiers we are, we will do right by ourselves, our comrades, and humanity!"

No one said anything, yet no one left. Marlo looked at the other ten and saw shock turn into understanding, then into determination. They were all in, even Hitch!

This isn't what Marlo wanted. He wanted real justice, real reform, for the Military Police. What Reiner was talking about was a coup.

But the system was rigged against them. These two men were making this deal out on the main road, and from the sounds of it have made similar deals a number of times before. And what the one bastard said, he couldn't imagine anyone being that depraved of morals. But if they did exist, and were officers of the Military Police, then there was really no way around it. Action had to be taken.

"What do we do now, sir?" Reiner smiled

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S.N.: So as I have said before, this is the last chapter before the 57th expedition begins. Who will be the first person to meet Eren beyond the Walls? Will he be human or Titan when that person or persons meet him? Will more people keep dying? Even I don't know yet, but I'm working on it. I'm sure you'll all love it, especially if you've enjoyed the story so far. Let me know what you think of the chapter in the reviews, I'll be more than happy to reply and we can have a back and forth on the story. The greatest way to grow as a writer is to

learn from one's peers after all. Before I go, let's wish a happy belated birthday to Annie, Eren, Connie, and Jean. They've been through shit, and if Isayama and I have our say in it, we're going to put them through a hell of a lot more. That's it for me this chapter. See you all next chapter.

## Chapter 9

S.N.: Chapter Nine inbound everyone! Who else is excited? \*dodges rotten food thrown at face\* Okay, I'm sorry it's taken me so long to upload. The content of this chapter got away from me, so decided to break it in half so I could edit and upload within the calendar year. Therefore the "Eren meeting people" is "technically in the next chapter, but really that was part of this one, so I didn't break my promise, right? In other news, we've passed the 150 review marker, which is pretty good if I do say so myself. Not only that though, but we are also the 7th most popular EreMika fic on the site, which is really awesome! I'd also like to give a shout out to Victorules for pointing out a glaring error in the last chapter, as it turned out that every instance of the name "Krista" was deleted in my document, messing up many sentences in the scene she's in. If you want to reread that part of chapter eight (which I recommend), it should make much more sense now. And in regards to canon, we are at chapter 75 and things are seriously heating up now. The Beast, Reiner, Bertl, and their forces vs. The Survey Corps, I'm on the edge of my seat in anticipation for how this will go. With Eren now capable of hardening, there's almost no way he can lose against Reiner, right? That's everything to report on my end, so let's jump in!

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Year 850, Day 50 after the Breach of Trost District, Night of the 57th Expedition, Karanese District

He couldn't sleep. He knew he needed the rest, but when he closed his eyes, his mind began wandering towards thoughts of Trost. If reclaiming the district with the casualties they had was considered a victory, he didn't want to know what a defeat in the Survey Corps was. But he was resigned to his decision; not really much that could be done about it at this point.

Giving up on rest, Jean rolled out of bed, mumbling about how the heat in the room was going to his head. The room he was in was

packed with bodies of fellow rookies and younger veterans. The recent relocation of the Survey Corps launch point had left little time for them to acquire proper housing, and while the Garrison was willing to put up some of the expediting soldiers, the rest were forced to bunk in the couple of rooms the Corps could cover at one of the local inns. Jean was lucky to get one of the beds, as a number of the other trainees were stuck using their bedrolls on the floor.

Rather than waste half an hour attaching his prosthetic, Jean grabbed the walking stick he'd been provided with early on. Using the stick and nearest wall for support, Jean navigated his way out the room, careful not to kick Connie's football head or step on Ymir's hair or anything of the sort.

Reaching the door, Jean pushed it open, only to cringe at the cacophony of noise the rusty hinges made. Cracking it just enough that he could slip out, Jean stepped out of the room, though it looked more like stumbling if there were any outside observers to watch. He then made his way down the hallway, a balcony at the end overlooking the streets at the end of the hallway.

The streetlamps pierced the gloom of night, revealing deserted streets below. Everyone in the district was home, soundly asleep, for tomorrow was just another day. He leaned back on the side rail, resting his stick along the outer façade of the building, and looked up.

"Well, at least it's a nice night, clear skies and all," he sighed despondently. Tomorrow might be the last day their circle of friends might all see each other.

The thought of running for it entered his mind again; he could make a break for Trost right now. He was good enough at using the prosthesis that he could be long gone by morning. No way would the Corps stop the expedition to search for one rogue soldier. He quickly cleared his head of that thought though. 'If they didn't hunt me down after the expedition then the Military Police would, and Trost would

be the first place they'd look. And Mom would be so disappointed in me, I just can't do that to her.'

So Jean stood there, breathing in the cool late-spring almost-summer air, while looking up to find some of the constellations he learned of while in training. They didn't have much purpose save for direction, but the imagination took off with the names and short stories behind each one. Maybe they would brighten his mood.

'Let's see, those three make a line, and those two make a box, is that the big cat thing? Or maybe the bull, Taurus I think.' He didn't notice the other figure leaning on the other side of wooden outcrop until they spoke.

"Orion find ya?" The sudden end to the silence made Jean's heart skip a beat. "Pops always said if Orion finds ya, yer bound fer a good hunt." Looking down and turning around, Jean saw Sasha leaning on the opposite railing.

"Walls Sasha, don't sneak up on me like that," he grumbled.

"I di'n't sneak up, I jus'," she paused to yawn, "I jus' walked ova here and ya weren't payin' attention." She shrugged and began rocking on her heels. "Guess ya coul'n't sleep too?"

"No, it's too hot in there to even try."

"Norm'lly I'd say fair 'nough, but now 'm callin' BS Jean. Orion called ya out here, jus' like me. He sees yer freaking out 'bout the expedition too," she stated quite confidently before ending her rocking.

"You're freaking out now?" he queried at her relaxed facade, trying to cover his own panic with curiosity.

"Course I am, who wouldn't. Ya heard Commander Eyebrows, we rookies have it in fo ou'selves. Thir'y percent of us ain't comin' back. 'm not good a' math, but I can see those ain't good odds fer our circle

of nine." The fear in her voice with the assuredness in her face left little doubt in Jean's mind that she believed 100% what she was saying.

"You know if you came out here to cheer me up, you're failing quite horribly."

"But Orion's watchin' us Jean. Maybe ya don't know this, but he's been the patron of hunters as far as m' family can 'member, 'nsuring a safe hunt for all. And what're we if not hunters 'morrow?" Her grin was different this time, not the goofball smile she showed when she was joking around with Connie, but instead a more determined, self-confident one.

"So you're saying a bunch of stars are going to keep us safe from the Titans?" At least the Wallists had the Walls and their mystery to back up their beliefs. No way she could be serious. Was Sasha just trying to prank him, get in a laugh before the expedition?

Sasha just shook her head, trying not to laugh at Jean's denseness. "Not stars, they're jus' his medium. The spirit of the ole hero is what'll keep you 'n me safe 'morrow." She turned and leaned forward on the railing, looking up at sky.

"So he's what, a god then? Like the Goddesses of the Walls?" he asked, joining her on the railing but looking down at the street.

Sasha closed her eyes and replied with a hum, thinking how exactly to answer. "I don' really know, y'know? 't's somethin' my family's shared 'gain 'n again through gen'rations. Most 'f his story's lost t' us cause of that; we know he was t'e greatest 'f us all 'fore he died, 'n a higher power set 'em up 'n the heavens to watch o'er us. The rest..." she shrugged

"Sounds a bit crocked up to me," Jean put bluntly, turning to face her. "I mean, couldn't ya have a bit more to that?"

"It'd be nice to, but 'nfortunately 't's not so." She turned to meet Jean's gaze, arm propped up on the railing so she was still leaning to the side. "Let me tell ya somethin' though. 'fore Trost, night we got our rankin's, Orion called me 'n Connie out." She place her free hand on his shoulder. "I was scared. Ya saw 'ow we 'lmost died in the tower tryin' t' clear out the Titans, but he intervened 'n saved us. And t'e breach, like I said I ain't good at numbers, but how'd we 'll live? By Orion's grace is how. We've made it 'til now Jean 'n I promise on 'is name we'll make it 'morrow, for be'er or worse for wear."

Gone was the fear that had been present prior, replaced with small smile filled with self-assuredness, and Jean just couldn't help but be a bit moved. Whether or not this Orion really guided her, the message he could draw from Sasha's words comforted him. They would beat the odds and, as the hunters she saw them as, beat the Titans.

"Thanks for the pep talk Sasha, I needed that." Jean returned with a more subdued smile.

"Any time Jean." Smile still in place she removed her hand from his shoulder and returned her attention to the stars. After a moment of watching her, Jean decided to join her.

"Y'know I've never heard you speak like that before," Jean mentioned off handedly.

Glancing at Sasha when she didn't immediately reply, he saw that she had tensed up, before spitting out a hasty "it's nothing." Obviously she wasn't comfortable with the topic, so he decided it'd be best to drop it, leaving them in an uncomfortable silence.

"Any other spirits up there in the sky?" Some small talk would surely put them more at ease. On top of that, he was really curious about this star stuff Sasha had been talking about.

The noises of the night were deafening, but Sasha came back more animate than before, happy to share her family's tales with someone

new. Jean learned many that night: amongst them were Leo, the mighty cat that was once the bane of all hunters; Pisces, a great fish uncaught for centuries who's meat fed a town for years when it finally was; Virgo, a warrior woman who lived and died by the blade and who's lifeblood brought great abundance unto the field she fell.

The entire time she spoke, Jean noticed that Sasha would occasionally slip into that other accent of hers before quickly reverting to what he was used to. It definitely wasn't an accent he had heard before, but that was just another quirk he chalked up for one of his friends. Maybe he'd learn about it at a later date.

Eventually he could feel himself start to drift away from consciousness, and judging by how her speech began to slow so was Sasha. "Hey Sash, you think we should get to bed now?" She nodded groggily, pushing herself off the balcony's edge. Instead of schlepping ahead or waiting for him to start limping along, Sasha ducked down and pulled Jean's good leg and left arm over her shoulders, carrying him back to their rooms. Jean would have protested, but he found he didn't have the energy to give a damn.

Looking back at him as she walked, Sasha had to get in one more joke at Jean's expense. "Hey Jean, you're kind of heavy. You been bulking up for Mikasa?" She smiled at him with her shit eating grin as Jean just sputtered for a descent response, earning him some poorly contained giggles. If there was any real light in the hallway she would've been in stitches at his blush.

"You- you just shove it Potato Girl," was his intelligent response.

"Come on Jeanie, you can think of something better than that. You all wore that name out in our first year of training for Pete's sake," she huffed. 'You get busted for taking one potato and that's the thing everyone remembers you for.'

"I don't know what Pete's got to do with this Sash, I thought he joined the Garrison." It took a minute for Sasha to get what he said before making an "oh" noise, remembering one of their fellow trainees from



the 104th was named Peter. She could hear Jean snickering at how clever he was from her shoulder.

"See Jean, now that's a better joke." Taking a couple of more steps, she stopped outside the door to one of the rooms. "This is your stop, right?"

"Yeah, thanks Sasha." Sasha released his leg to let him swing to the ground, keeping her grip on his arm until he propped himself on the wall.

"You gonna get to bed okay?"

"Yeah. I made it to the balcony just fine, I think I can handle this." He finished with a loud yawn, matched by an equally loud one from Sasha. He tried to wipe the sleepiness from his eyes, but he had been awake for too long.

"Just remember, I offered. Don't blame me if you keel over someone on the way to bed." She gave him a light pat on the shoulder before turning away to her own room. "G'night Jean."

"Night Sasha," he yawned out again, opening the door and hopping through.

Less than 30 seconds after Jean closed the door behind him, Sasha heard a faint groan following something large hitting the ground. She bit her lip to restrain a laugh at her friends' misfortune.

Slipping down the passageway and through a door, she managed to slide into bed without incident. 'Finally, I think I can fall asleep,' she thought as she reached to pull the covers over her, only to meet unexpected resistance. 'Why's the innkeeper got to tuck the sheets so tight?'

Giving the blanket a few more tugs, it finally came loose, and she began settling into the mattress. Before she fell into the entirety of unconsciousness though, a hand gripped her shoulder and turned

her. Not a quarter meter in front of her she faced a flustered Krista chewing her fist beneath a pissed off Ymir, both lacking a stitch of clothing on their bodies.

'I'm so dead,' she gulped.

Any attempt to speak on Sasha's part was stopped by Ymir's hand over her mouth. "Shut up, get out, and maybe I won't kick your ass tomorrow Potato Girl," Ymir hissed.

Sufficiently cowed by Ymir, she quickly nodded before making a hasty retreat, throwing the blanket behind her. Quickly and quietly Sasha tried to find her bed while also trying to not trip on the soldiers sleeping on the floor. Finding it on the exact opposite side of the room and devoid of any other occupants, she dove in, pretending she didn't hear a flurry of movement following Ymir saying "Where were we?"

When sleep finally took its hold on her, Sasha was unfortunately visited by nightmares of a Ymir Titan chasing her down until it was within as kicking range. It might've been funny if it wasn't so scary.

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Year 850, Day 51 after the Breach of Trost District, Day of the 57th Expedition, Forest of Giant Trees

If one were look off into the east now, they would see the cool blues and purples of the night sky give way to the warmer pinks and oranges of dawn's rising sun. The bright yellow circle would soon dispel the twilight's chill with its radiance, signaling the start of a new day.

This would also signal the one "human" resident of the Forest of Giant Trees that it was time for him to return from its outskirts to what made for home. Steam began billowing into the sky, intermingling with the muggy morning mist of summer as Titan flesh dissolved around him into nothingness, leaving him within a soon to be shattered skeleton.

Regaining his faculties, he brushed his bangs back from his face to get a clear look at his surrounding; not a single body in motion. The still silence of dawn filled the forest, the sound of stomping footsteps having yet to break the peace.

Climbing to his feet, he hustled to the roots of one of the giant trees, under which he had stowed his gear. The night's exercises left him exhausted, and though the local area may have been cleared of threats he couldn't risk being caught off guard on the ground.

He tugged at his belts to ensure their security, then began attaching his gear piece by piece to his person. He'd practiced this so often he could have done it blind; it was almost instinct to him at this point.

The young soldier ran through a mental checklist for his gear with the corresponding actions: bouncing about on the balls of his feet to ensure all pieces were completely secured, thumbing the joystick on top of his grips to ensure the hooks' pivots were clear, releasing gas through the fans to ensure the piping was all connected, anything pertaining to its ability in keeping him from being eaten should the situation arise.

Once that was done it was time to get off the ground; it was only a matter of time before the regular Titans became active again. They weren't too much of a problem in small numbers, but if they swarmed him like in Trost, that would be the end of him.

'If only I could shift with my gear on, I'd be able to get out and keep fighting. Can't keep breaking the equipment though, too many busted canisters, and I don't want a repeat of that last supply run.'

Teeth were grit as the shifter began his ascent into the treetops, the wind whipping past his face, pushing even more unruly hair past his ears and out of his face. The thought of a haircut flit through his mind, but the lack of a mirror and something smaller than a sword to cut with put that on hold.

As the sun's light began to filter into the forest, the young man couldn't help but to appreciate the sounds of reawakening life: early birds greeting the morning with their chirps; the low droning of insects as they emerged from their hiding places; the rustling of the wind as it caressed the branches of the giant trees; the soft crunches of deer and other ground dwelling creatures making their way about the underbrush.

And heavy footfalls of the Titans, slowly roused from their toral hibernation.

They were well out of reach now. Even if an abnormal were able to jump at him, there was enough distance between him and the ground that it wouldn't be hard to change direction in time.

Pushing the memory out of his mind, he focused instead on the peace of his surroundings, letting it flow in with the wind and carry out the exhaustion and worry that filled his being. The perspective and freedom 3D Maneuver Gear granted him were incomparable to anything life had yet offered. Too soon did the feeling come to an end as he finally arrived "home".

It was the closest thing that he could come to as a home at this point. A platform comprised of broken off branches layered with worn wooden planks and repurposed wooden crate panels, supported by two near level branches. The space was no more than ten by ten meters with a "roof" of tarps held up by ropes and sticks, protecting its resident and supplies from some of the elements. Time may be found in the future to improve it as it became necessary, but it would have to do for time being. Training was what took precedence.

Having just finished for the time being, the young man seated himself atop one of the supply crates scattered along the surface of the platform.

'One last thing I need to check before I rest,' he spoke internally. Opening the jacket he had managed to not destroy from shifting the past three weeks, he removed a blade from under his torso belts,

then grabbed the one tucked under the belts of his thigh. They were previously one blade that had shattered, rendered useless despite being as sharp as a fresh blade, at least until last night.

Clearing his mind, the inexperienced shifter began rubbing his fingers along one blade, then the other. To his expected dissatisfaction the one that had been within his jacket had maintained its fine edge, cutting the skin, while the one on his leg had lost all of its bite, no matter how hard he press.

It was quite apparent that while clothes and what they shielded were no longer dissolved by his shifting, anything outside would be, or at the very least warped beyond use. 'If the bamboo steel of the blades still can't stand up to my transformations, there's no way my gear will either. If only I understood how I stopped my jacket from dissolving, maybe I'd be able to figure out how to do the same for the steel.'

Once his wounds had healed, the soldier released the clasps holding his gear in place before sliding down onto his bedroll. Pulling the red scarf up to his face, he took a deep breath through his nose, and for a second Eren was truly home again. He could imagine his home back in Shigansina with his mom and dad; the barracks he, Armin, and their friends called home; and Mikasa. It was almost funny how he was clinging to such a simple piece of fabric, but then he remembered how she did the same. It was almost like magic, how it affected them both. With that thought a brief smile grew on his face, hidden behind the red threads, but as quickly as the moment came, it ended. The scents that once permeated the cloth were slowly fading, replaced by his own the longer he stayed out here. Sliding it back down his neck, he stared up at the "ceiling", looking through a small gap in the tarps, into the canopy, and sighed.

There was no home for him now; that was a fact he just had accept for now, until either humanity defeated the Titans or he died. Given his current situation however, those two instances might not be mutually exclusive. That was a thought for a later date though. For now the Titan Shifter needed to rest. Training later today would

require he be at one hundred percent, and out in Titan territory who knew what might happen?

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Year 850, Day 51 after the Breach of Trost District, Day of the 57th Expedition, Karanese District

"Seriously? Reiner's already been promoted to squad leader in the MP? How?" Connie shouted across the breakfast table he shared with the other top ten trainees sans Mikasa plus Armin and Ymir. Across from him Marco read the day's newspaper aloud for all to hear.

"Here's what it says. 'Squad Leader Reiner Braun has been instrumental in the recent crackdown on crime within Wall Sina. His tactical knowledge and leadership skills have led to the capture of a number of ne'er-do-wells by the Military Police's newest recruits, including a group of whom were caught trafficking 3D Maneuver Gear. Commander Nile Dok gave this statement, 'The initiative and resourcefulness these recruits have demonstrated is what we need in the Military Police. Mr. Braun has shown us what the best of humanity is like and I am proud to say he has earned this promotion. The streets of the interior are that much safer thanks to his efforts and that of his comrades.'"

"I guess if anyone would do something like that, it'd be Reiner," Armin commented from the other end of the bench. "He's definitely good at getting people to listen to him, and he graduated second in our class for a reason."

"But Squad Leader in less than two months? That's got to be a record or something, right?" Sasha stated between bites of porridge she snuck from Connie's bowl. Catching his friend doing this, Connie pushed his bowl to the other side, hoping she would find an easier target.

"It's uncommon, but not unheard, at least that's what it says here. Look, here's a picture of Reiner and Bert! You gotta admit he cleans

up well." Marco flipped the paper in excitement to show everyone. At the center was Reiner saluting the photographer, the medal recognizing his new rank stuck to his chest, with Bertholdt standing nervous yet proud on his left, and two other recruits annotated as Marlo Freudenberg and Hitch Dreyse from the Northern 104th standing on his right. The former had an almost perfectly stoic expression, ruined only by the slight grin he was sporting, while the latter seemed to have a bit more of a gung-ho cheer about her comrade's promotion as she hung off the former's neck.

"He looks pretty impressive in this photo. Kind of wish I was working with him now. I miss the guy," Connie moped.

"Don't tell me you're chickening out before we even leave the gates," Ymir queried haughtily.

"Shut up, of course I'm not! I just miss that giant pectoral is all." The rest of the table broke into a fit of giggles at Connie's comparison, even Annie at the far end of the bench found it somewhat amusing.

Only Jean failed to laugh, unconscious as he was, as his face slowly slid off his hand and towards his porridge. Sasha reached out to save the meal from such an unbecoming fate, leaving Jean to hit the table with his face. That woke the poor man up and earned a few more laughs from the table's occupants.

"Hey Jean, did you get any sleep after you tripped on me last night?" Connie rubbed his side absentmindedly, remembering the foot that attacked him out of nowhere.

"What? Yeah, no, I slept, just had a nasty dream when I did," he finished with a yawn.

"Sorry to hear that man. Maybe you shouldn't stay up so late falling on people?" Jean just grumbled a response, lacking the energy to come up with a good quip to use against Connie. Looking down at his food, Jean saw that his bowl was already empty. Did he really finish already? He didn't even remember taking a bite.

"Here Jean, if you're still hungry you can have the rest of mine," Sasha offered what looked to be about half her porridge.

"Thanks Sasha," he yawned again, not questioning the oddity of potato girl willingly sharing her food.

"You have trouble sleeping last night too Sasha?" Ymir said whilst giving the eternally hungry girl a very knowing look.

"Just... nightmares, you know? Can't remember what of though, heh," she laughed, rubbing the back of her head. Satisfied, Ymir turned her attention back to her own bowl and her blushing blonde on her left.

A calm fell over the table from there. Conversation kept to lighter topics, as nerves and anticipation were felt in different mixes between the former trainees, save Annie. At the end of the bench, she just stared into space, occasionally glancing over at Ymir, before looking back into nothing. Attempts to engage Annie were solely met with quiet grunts and hums.

As time went on and the moment of their departure neared, their table was approached by someone they all hadn't seen for weeks.

"Hey Mikasa," Sasha waved a greeting at her friend. Everyone's attention turned towards the role model of their class as she approached, resolute and powerful as ever. "It's been forever since you've eaten with us. Come, sit down."

"Thank you Sasha, but I've already eaten with my squad," she declined politely.

"Oh, okay," Sasha sighed.

"What's it like, working with the elites?" Krista asked.

"Yeah, you're working with Captain Levi right? That's got to be so cool, working with Humanity's Strongest!" Connie piped in.



"Sounds like a lot of work to me," Ymir faux-yawned, passively paying attention to the exchange.

Mikasa shook her head at her friends' reaction. "Now's not the time for me to share guys. The Captain sent me here to gather you all to the Garrison station. It's time to go."

There were sighs of apprehension as everyone moved from the table. Looking beyond each other now they saw that the other soldiers that had been staying at the inn had already left.

As they began heading towards the door, Mikasa put her hand on Armin's shoulder, holding him back as the others left. No one gave much notice to this, save Jean, who glanced back at the two before turning back to Marco.

"Everything okay Mikasa?" Armin was still worried for his friend, he barely saw her now, but looking at her with her back straight and her eyes so much less sullen, he thought she was beginning to look like her old self. It gave him hope

"I'm fine Armin. I just wanted to say..." She paused. Maybe she shouldn't say it, she didn't want to jinx anything before the mission; she couldn't lose Armin too. If she didn't though, she might not have the guts after the expedition. The story's that have been shared in the Corps didn't instill much confidence to what everyone will be like after the expedition ended.

"Yes, Mikasa?" he encouraged her to continue.

The seconds she had stopped for felt like hours, but with Armin's nudging she finally continued. "Let's have that talk when we get back, okay?"

Armin gave her a small smile, a warm genuine one that she hadn't seen from him in a long time, and couldn't help but smile a bit herself. "Okay."

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Riding down the main street of Karanese District was an awkward affair for almost everyone. This citizens, who had never seen the Survey Corps marching towards the gates, filled the street with cheers for their success and victory, while some of the recruits, having never been part of one, were for the most part a bit flamboyant as they received the praise. A number of the veterans and the rest of the recruits to cringed at this display until they reached the gate.

Looking up, Krista's grip tightened on her reigns. The Walls never seemed as tall as they were in that moment. It was hard to believe there was something out there that could break through them.

Swallowing her fears, she turned her gaze forwards towards the gate, the personification of Wall Rose carved into the heavy slab of stone. Any second now the gate would rise and the Corps would charge straight into Titan territory.

"You ready Krista?" Armin spoke up from her side.

"Yeah. I'm just nervous is all."

"We've got this Krista, we were both in the top ten after all," Jean spoke up, pulling up along her other side. "We'll be able to handle ourselves just fine."

"Let's not forget we're riding on the inside of the formation running supplies, so the likelihood of running into Titans will be lower," Armin added. None of the rookies were currently being trusted to run along the perimeter of the scouting formation. 'At least try to learn something before throwing your life away' was what one veteran had said when a couple of the rookies complained about not seeing any action. It wasn't spoken, but the three members of the squad had no qualms with being somewhat removed from the front.

A series of shouts could be heard from along the Wall, followed by the sound of stone grinding against stone. The gate separating humanity from the Titans was slowly being raised.

There was a brief moment of quiet once the gate stopped, the border between Humanity and Titans standing completely unimpeded; as soon as it began though, it ended, broken by the Commander's order, "Forwards!" A wave of energy spread out to all the soldiers, carried by his voice and steeds, as they shot through the breach, forgetting for a moment that not all would return.

The illusion was quickly broken as several Titans could be seen approaching over the roofs of abandoned houses. Soldiers began peeling off to engage in singles and pairs, but rather than watch the fights unfold Krista kept her gaze on the path ahead and her surrounding comrades. Nothing could be done on her part to affect the outcome of those battles, so it would be best not to bother and avoid the heartache.

She did occasionally glance back to find Ymir to no avail. Only when they escaped the ruins of the previously inhabited village did she see her peeling towards the left flank with Marco and Annie.

She smiled, knowing her girlfriend would be with strong friends for the expedition. They'd see each other again once they broke for camp that night.

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The mission for this expedition was simple. They were to set a couple of supply stations along the route that would link back up with the old one the Corps took out of Trost. First they'd have to get out a ways from the Walls, to stay clear of any gathering groups of Titans approaching the District. Once they were deemed far enough they would begin to swing south. If things went well they would have the start of two depots before they reached the old route.

However, as a prominent veteran of the Corps, something Murphy, had once said, "anything that can go wrong out there, will go wrong," just before he fell from his horse and was trampled underfoot. He lived long enough after that to see the cart he was being transported in get crushed by a Titan, after he was impaled upon the cart's axel and likely a slow, painful death.

While expeditions didn't usually end like that, they were usually a mixed bag of results, mostly due to the sheer number of casualties each incursion into Titan territory entailed. The only squad that consistently did well in spite of this fact was the Special Operations Squad. Most attributed this to the fact that it had one mission consistent with each expedition: kill every Titan in their path.

Hearing that, one might think they were acting counter to the Commander's plan with the Long Range Scouting Formation, but in reality they helped make it as effective as it was. Only so many Titans could be avoided, even with Mike's superhuman ability to sniff them out from over a mile away. When any were seen coming straight at the formation, Levi's Special Operations Squad, the tip of the Corps' spear, dealt with them quickly and efficiently.

One Titan approaching from 10 o'clock was about to provide the front guard a demonstration of this fact.

Oluo served as a distraction, hovering just above the ground as he reeled himself in passed the feet of the monster. As the Titan began to turn after him, Petra quickly passed by as well on its opposite side, slicing its Achilles' Tendons as she flew by.

Before it even hit the ground, Oluo changed direction, twisting mid-air to face the downed Titan. His feet began sliding backwards as he made contact with ground, before his cables found home on the monster's side. Launching himself back, he was soon upon the Titan. A couple of strides up its back and the nape of the neck was separated from the rest of the beast.

Even with the disadvantage of fighting in an open environment, the skills of the elites showed through, pulling a clean victory out despite unfavorable circumstances.

"What do you think Petra, that's my 40th kill? Not too shabby eh?" he stated full of bravado.

"I'll admit, I'm impressed. I'd have thought you would've gotten yourself eaten by now," she replied good humoredly.

"You wound me Petra," he pretended to cry, fist held to his heart. "And here I was going to praise you for being such a great partner."

"Thanks Oluo," she smiled with the stolen complement. "Come on, Mikasa's got our steeds." She began jogging to meet the young women with two extra horses.

"I didn't actually give you that compliment!" he shouted as he hustled after her.

Mounting up with grace that came with years of experience, the three elites quickly caught up to Gunter and Levi at the head of the formation.

"Not bad you two, not bad. A bit sloppy in the middle there though Oluo, touching the ground and all," Gunther ribbed.

"You're just jealous I've got the largest streak after the Captain," he retorted, fixing his cravat with one hand to better match Levi. Both Petra and Gunther stifled their laughter at Oluo's posturing while Mikasa cracked a humored grin from the rear.

The thump of a large mass crashing to the ground broke their reverie to see the captain pulling back up ahead of them, settling back into his saddle. Not far from their right was the corpse of a 12 meter was steaming as it began to dissolve.

Mouths were agape at what the Captain had just done in a short span of time. Years of experience with him and even Gunther found himself surprised by the man.

"Shut your mouths, you're going to catch flies." The tone of Levi's voice carried made it sound like an order, but Mikasa could have sworn it meant as a joke. She shut her mouth, as did the rest, and redoubled their efforts to clearing the way for those behind them.

It wasn't more than ten minutes later when a rider appeared from behind, pulling up besides Levi. They spoke in a low enough voice that Mikasa couldn't hear them over the sound of beating hooves and wind whipping past her face. When the two separated, they came to a sudden stop, leading to the rest of the squad including herself to quickly follow suit, lest they wanted to miss what the Captain had to say.

"Alright, you all know the drill. The carts have begun to slow down to set up camp for the night. Mikasa, Dennis, you're with me on the right. Oluo, Petra, and Gunther, take to the left. We'll meet at camp once we finish our patrol around the perimeter. Understood?"

A unanimous voice of "right" sounded out from the five soldiers as they all split off. To ensure no Titans broke through their ranks as camp was prepped, the outermost squads would ride in concentric circles starting at about a kilometer in radius moving outwards around the campsite. Being at the front of the Survey Corps formation, it made sense that the Special Operations Squad would break off from the front to inform passing squads of this change tactics. From there the other squads would begin patrolling or head towards the formation's center to inform those Squad Levi would not get in their loop. With minutes everyone would know and the Survey Corps would be preparing for the night to come. In theory, any Titans that might come nearby at any point would be headed off by one of the patrols, however the success rate has unfortunately been less than 100%. Yet never has a Titan actually made it into camp, so it remained a valid tactic, at least that's what Mikasa was told.

They hadn't separated for long before the Captain beckoned her forwards. Dennis began to lag behind as she approached, giving Levi the privacy he wished for with whatever he wanted to say.

"Yes Captain?" Her curiosity was piqued, what did the Captain need to tell while the others were away?

"How're you doing Mikasa? You seem better."

"I'm... fine, sir?" She scrunched her eyebrows in confusion. Sure their workouts were intense, but nothing that'd cause concern.

"Most people can be pretty unobservant, dangerous when you're out her, but to me it was obvious you were in a bad place when you joined the squad." Mikasa wanted to speak up and say something to refute the fact, but she couldn't, turning her head away instead. "It's nothing to be ashamed of, it is what it is."

Mikasa refused to look back at Levi, instead focusing in on an interesting strap of her saddle while she hoped he'd just finish and let her resume their patrol as normal.

"You lost someone in Trost, didn't you?" The flatness of his voice did not match the force with which it impacted Mikasa with as she whipped her head to face him again. Not for a moment did Levi's eyes stop scanning the horizon to glance at her, yet she felt she had every ounce of his attention.

Since when did she wear her heart so openly on her sleeve like that? Had she always done that? Or was Levi just that good at paying attention to detail? She didn't want to talk to her superior about Trost though, she had only just become comfortable enough to talk to Armin about it!

"I'm not going to force the issue. I can tell you don't want to talk about it, and it would do no good for me to press you; I know the feeling all too well." Closing his he let out a breath he wasn't aware he was holding. "I'm not good with feelings, as I'm sure you've seen during our time together so far, but as your Captain I want to offer my help in whatever capacity I can."

She almost certainly wasn't going to, she hadn't known him for two months; the sentiment was appreciated however. Maybe someday in the future when she came to know him better she would, if she still needed the help. "Thank you Captain."

He hummed in acknowledgement. "Keep an eye on that horizon now," and he pulled ahead of her.

As luck would have it, they didn't run into any Titans on their route. They passed squads on the outside of the formation, alerting them to the end of the day's journey before sending them to patrol as well. Once the left flank were notified they met up with the rest of the squad at the rear, at which point they all began heading into camp.

It was bustling with activity as soldiers ran back and forth with supplies, setting up tents, lighting cooking fires, feeding and watering the horses. Dismounting their own, Squad Levi minus Dennis, who peeled off earlier to rejoin his squad, handed their steeds off to the soldiers on duty before heading further inwards.

In the center of the camp was what Mikasa assumed to be the command tent, judging by both the size compared to the other tents and the Wings of Freedom emblazoned on the center of the sloped roof.

"I'll leave you all to get some rest. We have second watch tonight." With that Levi broke off and entered the tent before them.

"Great, of all the shifts we have to take, we had to get the one right in the middle of the night?" Oluo complained. "There goes a good night's rest," he bit sarcastically.

"At least we have time for a meal. I think I smell soup boiling from one of the fires," Petra commented. Indeed, Mikasa could smell it too, a hearty vegetable. Maybe if they were lucky they'd have used some chicken stock mixed in. "Come on lets go," Petra motioned for the others to follow.

Weaving their way through the moving bodies, Squad Levi arrived at the source of the smell. Unfortunately they were using the regular vegetable stock, but with everyone else still going about their assigned tasks they got the first choice of baked potatoes and bread loaves, which was almost as good.



Sitting themselves around one of the unoccupied fires, the four devolved into idle chitchat between bites of that evening's rations.

"So Mikasa, how's ole Shadis doing? I hear he's working the trainees hard," Gunther mumbled at one point through a piece of half chewed bread.

"He's... tough, to say the least. His expectations for us were really high, higher than the Walls even," she started in a small voice, slowly growing into itself.

"Not surprising, knowing the old hardass," Gunther stated. "What is surprising is that so many of you survived him," he chuckled, earning a small glare from Petra.

"Do you know Commander Shadis?" The man had certainly held the air of a veteran. Maybe he was in charge of the Special Operations Squad at one point? He was certainly looked old enough to have been forced into retirement. Did that even happen in the Survey Corps though?

"You don't know?" Gunther shot a quizzical look at Mikasa, which was met only by her shaking her head. Gunther glanced at Petra and Oluo who, despite glancing up between bites, seemed more ensconced in their food than the discussion at hand. "You think he gets the title 'Commander' just because he's in charge of the Trainee Corps?"

Mikasa just shrugged and shook her head. Gunther had really gotten her attention though.

Gunther leaned in towards Mikasa, swallowing any bits of food left before continuing. "A lot of us vets here know him as Commander Shadis, leader of the Survey Corps. He was the previous Commander who we were serving under until after the fall of Maria."

"You're kidding?" Mikasa leaned in to match Gunther, her curiosity piqued.

"Yeah, he was a good leader. We held territory beyond the Walls at one point thanks to his efforts," he spoke with great reverence.

"Really?" she replied with genuine shock. She'd thought every mission until Trost to reclaim territory had failed. Why wasn't that a bigger thing in regards to the Corps?

Gunther continued. "Unfortunately we learned the hard way that Titans could climb trees, and that ended that. They tore our fortress to pieces, along with anyone left inside." The glare Gunther gave his soup bowl betrayed his frustration with the event.

"Was that why he left?"

Gunther took a few seconds to glare at his food before looking up again to acknowledge her question. "No, that wasn't it. That was a few years before the fall of Wall Maria. As chance had it, he retired almost immediately after The Fall. He didn't give any reason beyond that he felt it was time for new blood to take over. But returning from the last expedition beyond Maria he broke down in the streets, screaming about how we failed as a military branch. Combined with the fallout following The Fall didn't do him or the Corps any favors."

She remembered that day all too well. They had gone to see the Survey Corps as they returned to the safety of Shiganshina; their faces were haunted by loss and defeat, numbers obviously depleted from when they set out, even by her perception then as a child. The greeting they received was less than pleasant, and she had to drag Eren away when he tried to defend the Corps by attacking one of the adults. It was stupid of him to go after someone three times his size like that, it had her thinking he'd do the same if he joined the Corps, and so she told Carla his plans later that day. This led to yet another argument between Eren and his mother before he ran out of the house in his frustration, not long after which she ran in tow. Thank goodness she was able to keep track of him, or else those bullies going after Armin would've thrashed Eren as well.

They were so hopeful then, planning how they would escape the Walls and see what world laid beyond. The sea, that sounded like such a wonderful place.

And then the Colossal Titan showed up.

The events after that were a blur. Debris falling, screaming civilians running for the ferry, panicked soldiers mounting a failing defense, and Carla, trapped under the beams of their house.

Thinking again, maybe she should have been glad she had angered Eren, otherwise they all would have been in house when the roof collapsed. They all would have died, and Armin would have been left all on his own after that damned crusade.

But maybe not. Maybe one of them would have seen the incoming debris and they could have evacuated safely. Maybe Carla could have found a way for both herself and Mr. Arlert to not go on that crusade with the others. Their family might've been more whole, and Eren...

She stopped the train of what-ifs. At this point she knew they only served to hurt her.

'This world is beautiful, but it is also cruel,' she mused, returning from her mind to reality.

Regaining her bearings, Mikasa couldn't help but flinch when she heard Gunther snapping his fingers in her face. "Hey Mikasa, are you okay?"

"Yeah I'm... fine. Just, bad memories is all." She didn't want to say Gunther triggered them; it wasn't his fault, he was just trying to make conversation.

"I see," he finished awkwardly, looking into the campfire and away from her.

'So much for conversation.' She turned to look into the fire as well, a small comfort in this lost territory. She slid closer to the fire, curling in on herself as the night's chill began to settle in. Her eyelids slowly became heavy with sleepiness as she began to slowly drift into unconsciousness.

Petra pulled her back before she was completely out, helping the young Ackerman to her feet and guiding her to their tent. With the fire's warmth was quickly missed as they moved farther away, Mikasa tried to wrap her cloak tightly around her, bunching the two ends together in one hand as Petra's occupied the other.

Petra looked back at her to say something at one point, but Mikasa's sleep addled mind couldn't process the noises. However it could process the motion of being gently pushed down to the ground, the feeling of a softer-than-earth substance yielding under her prone body, and a comforting fabric being laid over her as she faded away

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At the edge of the forest, the moon shined enough light for Eren to see the giant figures slowing down for the night. It was disturbing to see the monsters he hated so thoroughly become so peaceful, so harmless. He knew all too well what they were capable of. They were the reason he was standing here.

It would've been righteous in his mind to kill them during the day, prove that he was better than the Titans, but if he slipped and was overwhelmed, that'd be it, the war would be over for him. He wasn't ready to die, there was too much work for him to do.

So he played it smart, training in his Titan body at night when they others were lethargic. The Deviants proved as troublesome as ever, but without the worry of being swarmed as imminent in his mind, they were easier to deal with.

They just kept coming though. He could clear out a section of what had to be at least a hundred square kilometers of just as many Titans, but when he visited again midday the morning after it was

almost as though he hadn't done a thing. The only evidence to prove otherwise were the burn marks and ashes left by the evaporating corpses.

There had to be an end to them though, right? Titans aren't made or bred, so as long as someone remains to fight them, victory had to be a guarantee. Maybe he wouldn't see the day, but surely he was making that day a lot closer.

Without even paying attention he'd already brought his hand to his mouth. Taking a deep breath, he bit into the flesh around his thumb, and for an instant the world disappeared.

The first few times Eren had transformed had been frantic and sudden, the need to fight and survive at the forefront in those early encounters, but when he began training he noticed that the transformation was an almost comforting experience. His body became wrapped in a warm cocoon, but at the same time it felt a part of him, like when he'd have a bath as a kid and the water was still warm enough that he almost lost sense of where his body ended and the water began. While he could no longer move his human body, he was one with his Titan form, and the power he could feel from just moving his limbs, he felt nothing could beat him.

As life was breathed into his monstrous countenance, Eren was aware of the world around him once again. It was time to hunt.

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It didn't take long to find his first target, a nine-meter deviant type running north-west, ignoring him completely. Normally a boon, it proved a pain to run it down, but as soon as he caught the Titan he sent its head flying with a single punch, tearing out the remains of the nape before it had the chance to regenerate.

The thundering of heavy footsteps alerted him to more approaching from the east heading his way, maybe half a dozen or so. Rather than wait for the approach, Eren charged the small hoard head first, fist cocked back for a haymaker.

'Rest in fucking pieces!' An uppercut rocketed into the lead Titan's chin, obliterating its face as it was sent flying into the air. Before the thump of the body impacting the ground could be heard, Eren pivoted on his left foot, carrying his momentum onto his right leg as he whipped his left into a reverse roundhouse kick. Another Titan was caught in the chest, knocked on top of a smaller compatriot before a giant foot crushed its neck.

The thud of the first hitting the ground triggered something in the remaining three, as they went stopped running to turn towards Eren. Certainly they were not Deviants.

Seeing where the situation was going, Eren picked up the dissolving corpse beneath him by the legs, wielding it as though it were a club. The six and ten meter ones charged him, only to be swatted away like flies. When the three meter tried to spring onto his back, the rot of the carcass finally yielded and the torso came free of the limbs. The imp managed to take a bite out of his side, but not much more as it was crushed between Eren's side and his elbow.

The six and ten meter ones came back to their feet, as did the formerly leading one, steam billowing from its head as it regenerated its face.

'Time to rip that smirk off your face.' Eren passed by the stumbling giants, grasping the one Titan's head in his hands with increasing pressure until the skull exploded.

Grinding the nape of another monster underfoot, the other two were upon him. 'No big de-' Eren felt a sharp pain in his ankle, and soon found himself falling backwards. 'Shit!' The moment he hit the ground, the other two Titans were upon him, pinning his arms to the ground as they stripped the flesh from his body while, to his surprise, the tiny one he'd thought been crushed under the body of the second was gnawing at his leg.

The shock from the pain left him reeling. The feeling of the Titans ripping and tearing the meat from his bones, their blunt teeth and

finger nails cutting through his skin, only for it to regenerate and be eaten anew, it was agonizing. He was going to make them pay for this.

Eren began to thrash, trying shake at least one off for a moment to recover. The two on his arms held steady, but the midget lost its grip on his legs fell away. Perfect.

Not wishing to be denied its meal, it tried to jump back onto Eren's leg, only for the offending appendage to kick upwards and send it far away. If it survived it wouldn't matter now.

The lower half of his body now free, Eren pulled his knees into his chest before kicking out in an attempt to throw the others off and himself onto his feet. He must have overestimated the Titans' strength unfortunately, as when he did this, rather than knock them off his arms, he ripped his arms out of their sockets.

Fire ran through his nerves as they were shredded to bit, but Eren was still alive, and very, very pissed.

The now disarmed Titan Shifter turned on the Titans chewing on his limbs, ignorant that their quarry had severed himself from their current meal. 'Good, I'm about to have a bit of a meal myself.'

Bending down behind the ten meter Titan, Eren opened his mouth around the humanoid abomination's neck, then clamped down hard until he felt his teeth meet. As the corpse fell, he swallowed the severed nape and turned to the sole survivor.

His arm had disintegrated by then, and so the six meter Titan stood up and once again set its sights on Eren. 'Just me and you asshole.'

The Titan quickly closed the gap between itself and Eren, but in the brief time its approach took Eren raised one leg above his head and dropped it on the monstrosity's head like an axe, caving it in. For a moment it laid still on the ground, but the moment it tried move again Eren began smashing the last of his attackers into the dust.

And the night fell to silence once again.

'That was a close one. Have to keep an eye on those short ones.'

Eren just stood there, looking out at the horizon as he recovered. The sensation in his arms returned as they slowly began to grow back, the new limbs tingling from the superheated steam and whatever else went into restoring his body after being eaten alive. The pain in his arms began to subside, and once again Eren was at ease.

That didn't last long however, as in the distance he could see a number of figures lumbering westward.

'How are all those Titans still awake? And why are all they heading in the same direction?' The answer came almost immediately to his, and searched the horizon in hopes to be proven otherwise. He was not.

'Hell, the Corps is out here?' Further scans across the distance revealed two things to Eren. The first was that indeed the Survey Corps was here, in force and encamped only about half a dozen kilometers from where he stood. The second, and much more concerning observation, was that the mass movement of Titans was heading towards the encampment. 'They're going to be annihilated.'

He had to do something, it wasn't a question. They are the Vanguard of Humanity, if they fell, so would everyone within the Walls. They needed to survive, while his life was forfeit the moment he became a monster in Trost. Armin was almost certainly there, with Connie and Sasha and...

He was halfway between closing the distance with the nearest Titan before he realized what he was doing. With the remaining distance he prepared another haymaker aimed at its nape, obliterating it into a bloody mist once it made. He then crouched down, grabbing a four meter with an abnormally large head he had spotted his legs, and began using it as a club.



The warpath Eren began to carve was piled with steaming corpses, as Eren dealt death blow after death blow with fist, foot, and Titan club. But it wasn't enough. The few that didn't get distracted by him continued their march towards the humans.

'No, why can't I stop them?' Eren thought as he finished off another Titan with his club. To his great dismay the head finally snapped off, leaving him with a useless torso he quickly smashed underfoot.

'There's too many!' He was beginning to get overwhelmed. He tried to grab another Titan, use it to clear some room, but his arms were caught by the teeth of another. 'I'm going to die.' They began closing in on him. He could feel the heat emanating off of their bodies, grimy hands pulling at him, teeth digging into his flesh. He thought he felt fingers at the back of his neck. 'No. No! This isn't ending here! You can all go to hell! You can all just die!'

As Eren was pulled under the piling bodies, slowly being torn apart, he let out a defiant roar. The cacophony echoed in the night, a sudden stillness replacing the sounds of ravenous Titans reaching for their next meal.

'They stopped?'

Indeed the Titans had stopped, releasing him from their grips just to stand around him in a loose circle, staring at him. Then they turned from Eren to each other, and all hell broke loose.

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Annie shot up from her bedroll, gasping for her last breaths as her heart tried to beat its way out of its doomed prison. 'What was that?' She'd felt something yank her from sleep, something strong and malevolent. Pushing back the thin blanket she sat up, she scanned the area like a hunted deer, searching her surroundings for any threats.

There were none: her squad-mates laid curled up on their bedrolls outside there was only the sounds of crackling fires and resting horses. No Titans or soldiers approaching her.

Taking deep breaths, Annie steadied herself until her heart calmed down and the tension in her body uncoiled. "Just a nightmare," she exhaled. She brushed away the sweat running down the side of her face, trying to stave off the chill it would bring.

Sleep felt like it just might be within reach once again when, out of the black, Annie felt a force hit her entirety. It filled her, running through every inch of her being, holding such heat, she froze in place. There was no voice, no sound, yet it spoke to her. She could feel its anger, its malevolence, its call for death.

Before she knew what she was doing she could feel the icy bite of a blade pressed at her throat by her own hand. The sudden realization at what she was doing left her reeling, tossing the blade away in disgust and fear.

The sound of Ymir snorting as she rolled over startled Annie, thinking she'd woken the freckle faced woman with her actions, but she just settled back in, allowing Annie to think. It was pretty obvious what just happened. The power to command the Titans was just used; either by the general, unlikely considering the nature of the mission, or her target.

Eren was near.

Slipping out of her bedroll, she pulled her gear outside and to the side of her tent, facing away from the fire. If she woke anyone or someone noticed her, they might start asking her questions, and she couldn't let that happen. Taking care of them would be messy, almost certainly blowing her cover, but risks had to be taken.

Annie felt the power of the coordinate ability wash over her again, but she was prepared this time. It took most of her focus to stop her body from betraying her, but the force eventually faded and she was able to finish the checks for her gear. Peering around the corner of her tent, Annie muttered a curse. In the camp's center was where the horses were tied off; surrounding them and throughout the camp were a number of fires with at least one corpsman tending each of

them, standing guard. It looked like she'd have to hoof it until she could safely transform.

There was an issue with this plan now that she thought about it. She had no idea where Eren was. There was no obvious direction of where the power came from, it had felt as though it surrounded her all at once when it washed over her. And how near was he? Certainly near enough for his power to be felt, but she didn't know what the range was.

Annie remembered there were several cottages in the area they had passed just before they set up camp, maybe he could be set up in one of them. There was also the forest in the distance, the one with the giant trees to the south-east. Or he could be running through now, engaging the few Titans awake so long after the sun went down. It'd come down to luck finding him before dawn.

'Maybe I left too soon? I should head back now, see if I can get any information in the morning.'

Luck that didn't seem to be on her side. Just as she turned to return to camp when she saw movement in the distance. Cursing under her breath, she dove behind the nearest piece of cover, a rock not much bigger than Reiner when he decided to meet her in a crouch. Asshole.

Unfortunately it was right there where the group decided to stop.

"-see that, but I heard something." one of figures said.

Annie froze. 'Stupid, clunky, noisy equipment!' she berated herself internally. She'd been caught. She drew a pair of blades into the grips and prepared to end the soldiers with the misfortune of finding.

"Bullshit rookie, no way that could've happened," another voice said, clearly female and annoyed.

"I'm serious! They were to our east, several Titans ripping off the back of their necks and then falling over!" a third male griped.

'Wait what,' Annie faltered. Apparently she wasn't found.

"Titan's committing suicide, that's never been heard of before. Hanji's going to want to hear about this. And see it too," a fourth said, also a woman. She sounded as though she was the one in charge.

"Dammit, we're going to have to escort her, aren't we? There goes any hope of sleep tonight," the other woman complained.

"With how the Commander's been approving her every action lately, I wouldn't doubt it," the leader sighed, also exasperated at the idea. "I'll report this to the Commander, the rest of you wait by one of the fires, get what rest you can. This is going to be a long night."

With that the four soldiers vacated the area, and Annie released a sigh of relief. She was too close to having to engage those men. Standing up, she made her way back to camp, hopefully to get some rest for the night. Tomorrow would be a new day, a more hopeful day, for both her and her mission.

End

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S.N.: What will the Corps do with this knowledge of this event that was just witnessed? Will they ever know that they were just saved from near annihilation? Will Mikasa and Armin have that conversation? Those question and more will be answered next time on Dragonball- wait, what? Oh, sorry, wrong outro. I should've known, things actually happen in Attack on Titan.

Anyways, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. I'm really glad I finally got this out, it took forever as you are all aware. It looks a bit different from what I originally intended, but that kind of stuff happens. Actually a lot changed here in the final edits. Anyone care to guess

changed? I'll give shout outs to everyone who manages to guess correctly.

Speaking of shout outs, let's wish a happy belated birthday to Marco, Sasha, Reiner, Hange, Erwin, and Armin! Lots of birthdays happen when you miss half the year.

Thank you all for sticking with me this long. Please remember to R&R, and I will try not to take another five months with the next chapter. My PM box is open, so if anyone wants to talk feel free to drop by. Until next time everyone, Spartan Ninja out!

## Chapter 10

AN.: Who's the biggest asshole in the fandom? \*points to self\* This guy! In all seriousness, I'm sorry this took so long everyone. Of course I wanted this out a lot earlier, we passed the story's two year anniversary back in January and I wanted it ready for then. Things happened though, I won't go into detail, that'd take like a page of text here. You know what they say, anyone can start and fic, it's finishing one that's the hard part. But enough of that, you all know I'll finish this. Now, let me say that I'm very happy with the manga right now. Like things are happening, but keeping true to the story's themes so far, it's not without cost; a very, very steep cost. Poor Marlo, I was seriously hoping he'd get hitched with Hitch. Also, to anyone who's interested, if you need another anime to hold you over until season two, I highly recommend watching Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress. Same studio, similar themes, but god it's great. Seriously check it out. I need people to write fic for it. Anyways, enough of my ramblings, here's chapter 10.

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Year 850, 2nd Day of the 57th Expedition, East by South-East Wall  
Maria District, Outskirts of the Forest of Giant Trees, Pre-Dawn  
Hours

Dead. They were all dead. He'd killed them all.

Eren's Titan form was breathing heavily from exertion; this power took a lot out of him. It made sense though. If he understood it right, it didn't come from his focus or his anger, but from his sheer force of will exerted over the Titans. It has only been in the most desperate circumstances, when he had most wanted to defeat those monsters, he could call upon it, channeling his desire into a cry the Titans had no choice but to obey.

Eren's mind was a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions on this revelation as his Titan body fell to its knees, before keeling over

entirely.

'No... Not yet damnit... I Need... To get back...' He struggled to get his arms under his body, trying to push himself up to his feet again. He only managed to get one knee up before his flesh started to give way. His arms were torn from their sockets as the connecting tissue dissolved into hot air, sending him face first back into the dirt.

'Dammit... Why... Am I not... Strong enough...?' The rest of his Titan body followed, flesh evaporating into steam all around him. Eventually he was left alone in the skeleton of his former form, cold and on the verge of blacking out. A glance down his body saw that most of his clothes had dissolved, save his shirt and pants. Not even his boots survived the transformation this time.

Taking a minute to catch his breath, Eren had the chance organize his thoughts a bit. 'That took a lot out of me right there. It wasn't this bad last time. Maybe because there were so many?' Now in his human form, Eren managed to regain his feet, albeit just barely, leaning on one of his giant spinal columns to keep his footing. 'I'll think later on this later, gotta move now.'

Eren trudged his way back towards the forest, using the skeletal remains of various Titans for additional support when he could. He'd find shelter there, just long enough to ride out until morning, for him to get his energy back. He'd find his gear and get back to the safety of his platform.

He'd only covered a quarter of the distance from his corpse to the tree line when he'd stumbled to the ground and, just like in his Titan form, he struggled and failed to get up, his arms collapsing under his own weight.

"Come on you lazy bastard, get up," he berated himself, trying to fight the exhaustion. Since his body refused to return to his legs, Eren began the slow process of crawling the rest of the distance to the forest.

'Left, right, left, right,' was his internal monologue as he tried to find any additional purchase on the ground with which to pull himself along the ground. He was just starting to see the individual leaves on the trees when darkness began to encroach on the edge of his vision. 'No! I'm almost there.'

He tried grasping at the ground, drag himself forward just a bit more, but all his strength was gone. Despite his mental pleas, his last dregs of energy had finally left him as his limbs finally went slack. The sweet kiss of unconsciousness was almost upon him now. His last coherent thought, a hope, or maybe a prayer to the Goddesses, was, 'please, give me a chance to see the ocean.' And with that, Eren passed out in the field of corpses.

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Year 850, 2nd Day of the 57th Expedition, East by South-East Wall  
Maria District, Camp of the Survey Corps, Night Hours

"Very well, we'll need to verify this immediately." Erwin looked up across the table towards the squad leader across from him, obvious bags forming under her eyes. "You are dismissed," Erwin finished curtly. 'Hopefully she'll get some rest. We'll need her and her squad in top shape come morning.'

There was a moment of hesitation before she responded "Yes Commander", bowing her head as she gave him the proper salute, which he returned in kind. Now excused, the squad leader made her way out of the tent.

"So what're we doing Erwin?" Mike stepped from the side of the tent to take a seat at Erwin's left, leaning his chair back as he kicked his legs up onto the table. "Titans don't just up and kill themselves."

"No they don't, but then what do we know of Titan behavior? I'll send word to Hanji, send her squad to verify this and see what they could learn before we leave in the morning."



"You know she's probably going to want to set up her capture equipment? That'll be an issue this early into the expedition." Mike looked over at the Erwin, crossing his arms in front of him. It was a pain trying to catch one in the first place, luring one through that metal frame Hanji concocted; and then they had to walk them back to the Walls in a way it couldn't grab someone like a snack, which slowed down the entire formation. Mike had noted that expeditions where they failed to catch a Titan tended to have a definitive lower casualty rate.

"I do, and I understand your opinion on the subject Mike. However you and I both know how important her research is." Erwin spoke this with such certainty he could have been stating how water was wet, fire was hot, or the MP were corrupt.

Mike may not always agree with the Commander, but the conviction he had in his soldiers' capabilities was one of the reason he would follow Erwin to the ends of the Earth. Taking his feet off the table, he leaned in toward Erwin. "So what're you proposing then? I know it's not going to be to drag a Titan with us for the next week." They could barely handle one for a day.

"Send Levi and his squad with her. He'll keep her from taking things too far, keep her in balance so they all get back in time. He's probably getting his squad up for their rounds right now anyway," he said matter-of-factly.

"Shall I bring them here so for details?" Erwin closed his eyes and nodded, effectively dismissing Mike. He was up and out the tent flap before Erwin could open his eyes, his Titan-esque legs carrying him out in several large strides.

'I'm not going to get anymore rest, am I?' Erwin thought, taking a seat. Resting his head in his hands, he began to run the sleep from his eyes.

The sound of rapid footfalls alerted him not a minute later that one of the two parties was fast approaching, and he immediately composed

himself for their entry. The front of his tent opened with a flutter and in stepped a disheveled Hanji Zoe, half in uniform and half out of breath. "Commander I-" she was quickly cut off by a raised hand by Erwin, making eye contact with her before gesturing to one of the seats across the table.

"Please have a seat Hanji, I'll explain everything once Levi arrives. I'd rather not explain twice."

"Right," she assented, taking the offered seat, though not entirely calming down if Erwin were to judge by her fidgeting. Still, Hanji restrained herself, allowing Erwin a bit more time to gather his thoughts.

It was another five minutes before his tent opened again, in stepping a fully dressed and groomed Levi with a tin of tea in each hand. He didn't need an invitation as he took the other empty seat next Hanji. He reached across the table and placed one of the tins in front of Erwin, to which he nodded his appreciation. "I'm sure Mike has made you both aware of the situation. One of our patrols claims to have observed several Titans attacking one another, tearing each other to pieces. In every likelihood the bodies have decomposed by now, but I have figured that if anyone, you," he looked pointedly at the Corps' head scientist, "would like to observe the site to gather whatever information you can find. We break camp at dawn, so I expect you to return by then. Understand that you have permission to do what you can in that time save any capturing operations. We do not have the time or resources to drag one with us at this stage of the expedition. Do I make myself clear?"

Hanji nodded, though slightly reluctantly at hearing the last part. "Understood...."

He then turned to Levi, who was leaning back in his chair with his cup of tea held in his fingertips. "I'm assigning you and your squad the escort Hanji's to the site in order for them to better focus on their task."

"So we're babysitting Four Eyes and her crew? Figures." He took a sip from his cup. "Understood Erwin. Anything else we should know?" Levi asked with a raised eyebrow.

Erwin shook his head. "Questions Hanji?" It had certainly seemed she was about to ask something, but then she glanced at Levi and shut her mouth.

"No sir," she said quite plainly.

"I see, then you are both dismissed." Like Mike they didn't bother with the formalities of the salute, they just gathered themselves and headed out to gather their squads. Erwin didn't mind; the salute was a simple propaganda technique used to instill discipline and loyalty into the regular soldiers. The four of them were well beyond such individuals; there wasn't such a need from them when conversing with each other when in every likelihood no other soldier was as devoted as they were.

As Hanji and Levi left the tent, Erwin did notice that Hanji had suddenly become a bit dourer halfway through their brief meeting. If he had to guess it had something to do with Levi, but so far it didn't seem to harm her ability to fight or think, so he would allow them sort it out.

Now to enjoy the hot drink Levi had been kind enough to bring him.

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Year 850, 2nd Day of the 57th Expedition, East by South-East Wall  
Maria District, Outside the Camp of the Survey Corps, Pre-Dawn  
Hours

"Look, I'm just saying what can we learn from a bunch of rotting skeletons? It seems kind of- mph!" Oluo cut himself off, catching his tongue between his teeth. The pain and taste of blood in his mouth kept him from continuing his thought.

Both Gunther and Petra rolled their eyes at this all too regular occurrence. One would think Oluo would have learned not to run his mouth like that, but apparently it would take a bit more to get through to him.

"Orders are orders Oluo. We were about to go on patrol anyway," Petra replied slightly annoyed at his unfinished question. She caught a yawn in her hand before returning it to the stirrup of her saddle.

Both Squad Levi and Squad Hanji had just left the camp, still somewhat tired from the day's travel but ready for action nonetheless. The cart they had taken with some of Hanji's science equipment had been held lanterns at the corners, helping with the visibility for the squads in the dark, cloudy night as they formed a perimeter around it.

Scanning the horizon, Petra's gaze stopped when it came upon her newest squadmate. "Hey Oluo, you see Mikasa over there," Petra pointed to the man, who had just gotten over the self-inflicted pain in his mouth.

"Hmm, yeah, with the blonde shrimp from Hanji's squad, right?" his face taking a slightly curious look. It seemed the two were talking and, was that laughing?

"You know who he is?" Petra's voice matched the curiosity he displayed. The blonde mushroom cut was ringing bells, he'd made some waves with getting into Hanji's squad so quickly. What was the kid's name though...?

"Arlert. The kid's name is 'something that sounds like Erwin' Arlert." He shrugged when he couldn't get the first name. "I believe he's supposed to be from Shiganshina, same as Mikasa." 'Poor kid, having to go through that at such a young age.'

"You think they knew each other before the fall?"

Again Oluo shrugged. "Possibly. If the outer districts were anything like the interior ones, they probably knew everyone in passing at the very least." He paused. "Wouldn't that be a story to tell: two childhood friends, surviving tragedy and instead of crumbling, deciding together to stand up and fight back, risking life, limb, and maybe even love?" Oluo gave Petra a weird grin he probably thought was dashing while wagging his eyebrows up and down.

"Ugh, grow up Oluo. You need to stop reading those trashy penny romances," she scoffed, looking away from her friend in slight disgust. On second thought though, it was a bit of a cute concept, but as a concept. This was one of her squadmates, she shouldn't be thinking things like that.

"Hey, it's better than what some of the other soldiers use their paychecks on. Let me have my fun," he pouted. She'd be so insufferable if she wasn't so kind most of the time. 'And cute,' he thought, pondering whether or not he'd have the courage to ask her out after this expedition. Show her what he learned from those "trashy penny romances". For the time being he turned his gaze back to their watch, keeping an eye out for any Titans that happened to still be active.

Petra decided to let the situation rest and followed suit.

It wasn't more than fifteen minutes later when they encountered the first corpse. As expected, the flesh of the deceased Titans had already evaporated. The skeletons still held firm, and would likely last several more hours before they began to shatter.

Surprisingly they didn't stop there. Hanji had pushed forwards, leading the rest to follow after her. They began passing more and more Titans skeletons as they pushed onwards, until they came to what they concluded was the center of some sort of Titan graveyard. There had to be at least several dozen skeletons strewn all over each other, many with numerous breaks all about their bodies, the most noticeable of which were along the upper vertebrae.

"Alright, my squad listen up," Levi commanded with barely above a normal speaking voice. "Our job is to make sure Hanji's team can work without interruption before the main body saddles up. We're going to split up, Gunther with me, Petra with Oluo and Mikasa. We'll start half a kilometer from here and ride in concentric circles going outwards. You see a Titan, take it down. Understood?"

"Yes Captain!" the four said, saluting in unison.

"Good."

As they split up, Hanji's squad began dismounting, removing weird pieces of metal from under the tarp on the horse-drawn cart. Each group was handed an extra oil lantern by the scientists to guide them in their patrols. Levi gave Hanji a solemn nod which she returned in kind, and they were off.

Petra took the lead of their trio, lighting the way with her lantern in hand, with Mikasa and Oluo riding side to side at her 4 and 8 o'clock. They made several increasingly large circles around Hanji's squad, catching sight of Levi and Gunter every so often as they rode in the other direction. No Titans sighted though, and the lack of any noise of conflict from the circle's center implied that none snuck past them either; as expected at this hour, but out here there was no such thing as paranoia.

At one point Oluo was about to go into talking to Mikasa about the Arlert boy, get in some good-natured teasing to alleviate the tedium and exhaustion he was feeling. He didn't get out more than half a dozen words before Petra shot him down with a glare, as though she knew exactly what he was going to start, and instead muttered a never mind before looking away from the others.

"So how likely is it we're going to run into anything out here?" Mikasa broke the silence. Both Oluo and Petra turned their heads in slight surprise at hearing Mikasa speak unprompted.

"Not very, considering the hour," Petra piped up from the front. "Most run out of energy shortly after sundown; at this point it's mostly Deviants up and about. Considering the frequency with which they've shown up in the past though, I'd say we're pretty safe."

"Doesn't mean you should start slacking off now," Oluo butted in. "I don't want to have to save your lazy ass if a Titan catches us while you're asleep on your horse."

"Oluo!" Petra cut in sharply with another glare at him.

"What? I don't really mean it, I just want her to keep up with us. You understand, right Mikasa? All in good humor?" He turned to the woman in question, hoping for an answer that'd save his ass from a verbal beating by their resident redhead.

"Yeah, all in good humor," she replied with a small nod. "By the way Oluo, your fly's down" Mikasa pointed at the poor man's crotch, which grabbed hastily with both hands to cover up his embarrassment. It took him a moment trying to fix it to see that it was already set in place.

Looking up he saw Mikasa and Petra sharing a small laugh at his expense. He just gave a frustrated harrumph, though he was happy to see his comrade doing well now. There was definitely been improvement in the way Mikasa interacted with them.

He was stopped from any further musings when his horse suddenly stopped, rearing up onto its back legs with a loud whinny. "Woah Faeva, what's gotten into you girl?" He shouted as he tried to reign in his steed while not falling off. Mikasa and Petra took notice and stopped their own to make sure he would be alright. "It's okay girl, it's okay," he whispered, rubbing her snout once she stopped trying to knock him off

Of the two women, Petra looked most concerned. "What happened Oluo?"

"I don't know, something must have spooked her."

"Wolves maybe?" It certainly wasn't Titans from what she could judge. They would have certainly noticed by now.

"Could be; Hanji's warned us they might move into the territory without humanity present." Titans may be the biggest threat to the Corps, but there have been fools in the past that had underestimated the dangers of native wildlife and paid for it dearly. 'Poor Jenkins.'

"Let's get going then, we'll give Gunther and the Captain a heads up next time we run into them." To which Oluo and Mikasa hummed their assented. A third hum, coming out more like a moan, turned heads, as the three began looking at each other to see what just made that noise.

Hearing it again, a series of alarm bells went off in Mikasa's head; there was something familiar about that noise. A glance out of the corner of her eye saw a matte of brown hair above a familiar bit of red fabric that immediately caught her attention.

Leaping off her horse, despite the protests of her squadmates, Mikasa ran in front of Faeva to find a prone body before the steed. 'It can't be, there's no way it can be him.' She didn't dare believe, not after the pain she'd been through the past couple of months.

Petra's adjusted her lantern to illuminate the area, and two small gasps escaped from the veterans. "It's a kid? What the hell is a kid doing all the way out here," Oluo almost shouted in complete surprise.

"Has he been living out here since the fall?" Petra couldn't imagine the horrors the person must have gone through.

Grabbing the sleeve of the white shirt he was wearing, Mikasa turned the body over to see the scarred face of someone she thought was gone forever.



"Eren," she whispered. Immediately her head dropped to his chest, ear pressed against it in hopes of hearing a heartbeat.

Ba-dump. Ba-dump

"You're alive," she whispered. Mikasa's breath went unsteady as, in that moment, all the pain and heartache she had kept bottled up inside, that at times she thought was finally starting to ease with the support of her squad, came to the fore. This was only for a brief moment however, as soon afterwards even more powerful, positive emotions took over, as she had found what she had thought was lost forever. The tears and crying that came were of relief and joy as she pulled her best friend up into her chest, holding on for dear life for fear that if she let go he would be snatched away from her yet again.

Mikasa had her home again.

There was nothing that Petra and Oluo could say as they watched Mikasa clutched this unconscious kid, crying into his chest; they could only watch in stunned silence at her sudden display of emotions.

A shared look between them conveyed the same question without any answers, 'What do we do?' There was little time to try to figure that out as Mikasa picked up the mysterious person, mounting her steed with him in her arms, and took off in the direction of the main camp of the Corps.

"Mikasa wait!" Oluo shouted out to the fleeing woman, but to no avail. "Dammit, what the hell was that?"

Petra just shook her head. "I don't know. What I do know though is that I need to follow Mikasa. Oluo, you need to find the Captain, tell him what's happened, Okay? We'll regroup with Hanji's squad as soon as possible."

He simply nodded, turning to resume their route in hopes of crossing paths with the Captain as soon as possible. Petra watched for a

moment before spurring her horse after Mikasa, frustrated at the sudden shift in the situation.

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Mikasa rode like a woman possessed back towards camp. It was the safest place to bring Eren right now, and if there was anything wrong with him, then the medics there could take care of him. The fact that he was passed out in the middle of Titan territory with scars on the sides of his face certainly did not speak well of his health.

"I'm sorry Eren. I couldn't keep you from the military, so I thought I could protect you by following you. I thought I would be strong enough for the both of us. I was wrong, I was so, so wrong." Tears were still streaming down her face as she pushed forward. Why didn't she press harder to follow him in Trost? He wouldn't have left them if she'd been there to protect him, keep him from getting eaten as Armin said.

She didn't understand how this could be; she didn't doubt her friend believed what he saw, but that Eren was here before her said otherwise to his story. This all could very well be another dream that she might wake up from any second. It wouldn't be unusual. Yet every so often she would look down at Eren, slumped into her chest; she could feel the slight rising and falling of his torso as he breathed, the scruff of his hair against her neck, and the heat radiating off his body. It all felt too real to be a dream this time. It just couldn't be.

"Hmm... Oo's there..."

She felt Eren shifting from his slumped position against her, turning his head back to meet her gaze. When his half lidded eyes met hers they went wide and his jaw went slack.

"Mi-Mikasa?" he uttered with a breathless whisper, unable to believe what his eyes were seeing. This had to be a dream, or maybe another nightmare and this was where things took a horrible turn. But nothing happened.

Mikasa just looked at him, almost frozen in place as she stopped spurring the horse forward and it slowly came to a stop. Walls, she looked like she was about to break down; strong, stoic Mikasa breaking down, this had to be a figment of energy deprived imagination. Yet the strength of her arms around his torso as she pulled him into hers, the tickling touch of her hair against his face as she leaned forward, and the sound of her voice as she said "Eren", it all felt to real.

"Am I dreaming?"

Mikasa shook her head, her chin now resting on his shoulder as she leaned her head against his as she tried to keep her emotions in check. "Am I?"

He could hear the tears in her voice before he felt them on his cheek. What changed since he'd been gone? "This is real Mikasa," he stated, in a way that left no room for doubt, even if he still held some deep down.

Turning back around to look at her, a bit of an awkward effort still being seated in the saddle and all, he was greeted by an ever rare Mikasa smile. Small as it was, Eren was probably the one person alive who knew it best. He was taken completely off guard when Mikasa then threw herself at him, grabbing him into a tight hug that inadvertently knocked them both onto the ground, Eren landing on top her and thankfully neither cracking their sides against Mikasa's 3DMG.

Eren was about to shout at her for being reckless, but was cut off by the sound of muffled sobs as Mikasa buried her face in his chest, which at this point was only his tunic and their scarf. Not knowing what he should do, he sat up onto his knees, pulling Mikasa up with him as she refused to let go; her head was still buried in his chest, her tears beginning to soak through. He supported her with one hand on her back, holding her up, while the other stroked her hair in an attempt to soothe her. He felt a warm feeling in his chest, caring for

her like this. Everything just felt a bit more right now, holding Mikasa close like this. Walls he had missed her so much.

When Mikasa finally calmed down enough, she pulled her head back and looked up at Eren, reaching up to touch the side of his face in a final confirmation. When he didn't fade or pop or turn into a Titan like her nightmares, she smiled with a sigh of relief.

Eren returned her smile with boyish one on his own, taking Mikasa's hand from his face and holding it in his hand. Looking at her more closely, he saw her neck was completely bare, and remembered he had had the scarf on.

Grabbing his neck quickly, afraid it may have been lost in his most recent transformation, he felt the familiar piece of red cloth still around his neck and let out a breath of relief. Without any preamble, he began to undo it with his free hand. "I believe this is yours," he said, and then began to lazily loop it around her neck.

A few stray tears leaked from the corner of Mikasa's eyes, as this all too familiar gesture played out once again. "I thought... I thought you were dead?" she said shakily.

Eren shook his head, then pulled Mikasa's hand from his cheek to hold in his lap. "I'm sorry Mikasa," he said, looking down. He really had no other way to reply to that. If only things had been different.

Mikasa didn't know she needed to hear that until he said it. Just those few words seemed to make a huge difference as Mikasa was able to recompose herself. "Armin... Armin said he saw you get eaten trying to save him. What happened?"

Eren froze. He never thought he'd see anyone he knew for a long, long time, if ever, let alone someone who knew how he had died; he had no idea what to say without giving up his secret. "I... its complicated Mikasa. If I told you what happened, you wouldn't believe me." "Walls, why did he have to lie to her?" "Why are you out

here Mikasa? Why didn't you join the Military Police?" he asked, looking up at her as he quickly tried to change the topic.

"Armin was still intent on joining the Survey Corps after Trost, possibly even more so than before after... certain events happened." 'Would he believe me if I said a Titan inspired us and helped save Trost? Never, even I still can't believe that.' "I couldn't let him go by himself. That and... I felt if I didn't I'd be disrespecting your memory," she said, now her turn to look away from him at the ground, a slight blush on her face.

Eren felt himself becoming frustrated at her saying that. Walls, even when he was "dead" she still chose to follow him instead of leading her own life; yet a part of him was touched by this thought on her part. Before he had a chance to say anything, Mikasa continued.

"You didn't answer my question Eren."

So much for changing topics.

"Why didn't you come back and join the Survey Corps Eren? Why did you leave?" 'me', the last word of her question left only a thought as her stoic visage slowly set itself back into place despite the turmoil of emotions she was still feeling.

She wasn't the only one filled with internal turmoil following her spoken words. Eren's heart picked up the pace as he tried to think of a half-plausible lie to tell Mikasa. She couldn't know the truth; if anyone wasn't to find out what he was, it was Mikasa.

In the next moment, Eren thought if the Goddesses of the Walls existed, they were either smiling down on him or preparing to smite him, as the sound of a horse approaching caught their attention with someone shouting "Mikasa!" Turning to the source of the noise, Eren saw what had to be another member of the Survey Corps approaching on horseback.

"What was that Mikasa?" the figure asked as she came to a stop near them, dismounting her steed to approach them with a cross look on her face.

'Who is she?' Eren wondered as he looked from the unknown soldier to Mikasa, who now wore a very cowed expression as she jumped away from him to her feet.

"Not only did you break formation, but you ran away from your comrades with an unknown individual. Had you been attacked by the Titans, or worse by him, you would have had no back up to save you! Do you have anything to say for yourself?" she finished with crossed arms and a clenched jaw, cutting an imposing figure despite her shorter stature as she glared at Mikasa, taking note of Eren to the side no longer passed out.

Hesitating in her response, Mikasa took a deep breath before replying, her voice calm and cool, but tinged with defiance, something he'd been on the receiving end of many times as they grew up. "Eren would never do such a thing to me; we're family family."

The woman now identified to Eren as Petra was slightly taken aback by this statement, but made no other reaction other than to look over at Eren. 'Isn't he supposed to be dead?'

She sized him up, and for a moment Eren thought she had discovered his secret and was figuring out how to kill him, only for her to then turn back to Mikasa.

"That still doesn't excuse your actions Mikasa. We'll have to talk about this with the Captain once we regroup," she stated, not as harsh as her earlier, but still frowning quite visibly at Mikasa.

"I understand Petra," Mikasa said resignedly, knowing that there would likely be consequences from her actions made in the heat of the moment. She didn't regret it though. Rash as her actions had been, they had been with the best of intentions, and she had faith

that Captain Levi would show leniency in that regard once the full story was told.

Eren wasn't nearly as cool with the situation however, his desire to speak up for his friend boiling as he stepped in for her defense. "Hey, layoff will you!" he shouted at Petra, quickly earning her attention. "I don't know what kind of stick was shoved up your ass, but there's no way anyone would have handled this any better!"

Taken back by Eren's words, Petra's frowned. "Maybe, but regardless that doesn't excuse her actions. Disregard of standard operation procedures has killed too many soldiers in the past. What is to be done is to ensure she isn't one of them."

Eren couldn't find a response to Petra, and slowly the angry tension that built up within him uncoiled.

Taking a deep breath, Petra's face softened, appearing to calm down from earlier. "I sorry that I came off harsh Mikasa. I hope you understand I say this because I care about you."

"I do." Mikasa nodded at her squadmate's words, though her attention was still split as she continued to glance over at Eren.

'This is such mess' Petra thought with a sigh. "Come on, we need to return to camp now that we've gone off the patrol route. Are you okay to ride Eren?"

No, no he was not okay to ride back with them. As much as he might still want to see Armin again and continue their dream together, going back with the Corps meant it was only a matter of time before his secret was found out. There was no way he'd ever be accepted by the military or the people, and would most likely sent to the firing squad by the King himself.

Outside the Walls though, with his power, he could still do good for humanity. It was not as he had wanted to originally, but was professing more in exterminating the Titans than he ever thought

possible, which was certainly a lot better than dying at the hands of those he wished to help.

He couldn't go back.

Eren slowly began stepping away from Petra and Mikasa. He could feel the tension his actions were causing between them and was trying not to provoke either woman into any hasty reactions.

"Eren?" Mikasa called to him, her voice almost cracked as she saw him pull away from them. He was leaving her again. Why?

"I'm sorry, I can't," he said, shaking his head slightly.

"You can't? I don't understand Eren? You would be much safer with us than on your own. We can take you behind the Walls," Petra said diplomatically, trying to comprehend why anyone wouldn't want to come with them. "Out here, it's only a matter of time before a Titan catches you."

Eren just continued shaking his head. "Please, just forget you saw me." He could see Mikasa beginning to tear up as he said that. He wanted to walk over and tell her everything would be alright, but that would be a lie. He wanted to take her away with him to his place in the forest, but it wouldn't be safe for her. He wanted to share his secret with her, but he feared she might hate him for it. He had to hurt her to save her, to save them both.

"I'm sorry Eren, but I must insist you come with us." Though her voice gave nothing away, both Mikasa and Eren could see Petra's muscles tensing, her hands shifting down to her grips.

"Just let me go dammit! I don't want any trouble." Eren was panicking now. He could get away easily, but Petra and Mikasa were too close; if he tried to get clear Petra would surely close the distance, and his transformation would surely cause some damage. He did not fear for his life, but he did fear for theirs.



"You've been supposed KIA since Trost, eaten by a Titan according to reports. The fact that you're here and alive leaves a lot of questions that only you can answer. For humanity's sake Eren, please come with us." Petra did not want to fight Eren. He seemed like a good kid from what she heard from Mikasa, but if the story she had been told was true and this was really him, then this kid might know something that could change the tide of the war. If she did attack him though, which side would Mikasa stand on?

Eren's clenched his jaw, wanting to say something defiant, to run as far as he could, to fight, but he just couldn't see himself coming out on top. Unless...

"Okay," he acquiesced quietly, head bowed slightly, defeated as he stepped towards Petra and her steed.

Petra's hands fell from her grips as she felt a wave of relief wash over her, thankful that Eren hadn't forced her hand. Never did she want to raise a blade against another human.

Mikasa would have been relieved Eren had conceded to Petra's demands had she not been so surprised that his defiance faded so swiftly. Never had she seen him give up so easily. He was coming back with them though; Eren was coming back with them.

At least, that's what she thought until, Eren heaved the redhead woman from the saddle and threw her to the ground, grabbing the stirrups of her steed and spurring the horse away from them.

Mikasa just stood there in disbelief as Eren rode into the distance towards the tree line mounting her own steed to take off after him, not taking a second to think about her squadmate sprawled out on the ground. All she could focus on was making sure she didn't lose her best friend again.

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For a moment, Eren had thought he'd made a clean get away. Without her horse, Petra would need to take a minute to mount up

on Mikasa's, giving him the head start he'd need to lose them in the forest.

That ended all too quickly when he heard a second pair of hooves not far away. Looking over his shoulder he saw Mikasa, just Mikasa, pushing her steed after him. Neither of them seemed to be gaining ground over one another, but she was close enough that she'd be able to keep track of him.

"Mikasa, you need turn back!" he yelled, waving at her to go away.

"You can't really expect that Eren!" she shouted back defiantly.

'Why did she have to be so hard headed?' "I'm not asking Mikasa! You can't follow me!"

"No, I'm not losing you! It was hard enough the first time, I can't do that again!" The tears were now freely flowing down the sides of her cheeks again, pushed back by the wind whipping at her face.

Eren hated himself for this, for what he was about to do; he felt even more a monster than ever before for hurting Mikasa. "I've told you Mikasa, I'm not your damn kid brother for you to protect! Get a fucking life that doesn't center on following me all the Wall damned time! I'm sick of you!" Oh Walls, he felt like he was about to vomit saying that, but he couldn't let it show. He held a hard look of anger directed at the one of the last bits of family he had left in this world, trying to convince her of what he said.

It seemed to work. The harsh words sent Mikasa into shock; she just stared at him with a lost look as she slowly trailed behind. But then all too quickly her look of loss morphed into one of fear. "Eren, look out!"

Eren felt a lump sink in his stomach at this scream. Turning forwards to see what had Mikasa so scared, time seemed to slow down as Eren saw a Titan, one that couldn't be more than six meters tall,

leaping at him with its mouth wide open. There was no dodging this monster, not on a horse like this, not without his gear.

Glancing back he saw Mikasa jumping from her horse, swords at the ready to jump into battle, but falling back as she did it was obvious she wouldn't reach him in time.

As the Titan seemed to come closer and closer to eating him, Eren's mind came to one thought, one conclusion on how to deal with this. Transform. Transform! Transform!

When time picked up again, he kicked off his horse's saddle, making a beeline straight into the Titan's maw with one hand outstretched in a defiant fist while the other was brought to his mouth. He could hear Mikasa screaming over the whirring of the fans.

All noise was then quickly drowned out by the sound of the air around them exploding, accompanying the lightning coming down from the sky. For a brief moment the area was bathed in a blinding white light, out of which came a much larger figure.

Eren's senses once again began to spread beyond his human body, and a familiar feeling of power flowed through him. Opening his eyes, the now miniscule monster that tried to eat him had its mouth wrapped around his fist, unable to pull it out or bite it off. Had it been human, its face would have been filled with regret, but its blank look only served to prove how devoid these things were of anything human.

In one fluid motion, he drove his fist into the ground, pulverizing the Titan's skull into paste. He then punched its neck again several times for good measure, not wanting to risk it regenerating to come back after him.

With that dealt with, Eren hesitated with what came next. Carefully he turned around, looking down at the ground.

There he saw a dumbfounded Mikasa sitting on her knees, staring up at him with what he couldn't discern between fear and awe, though he was sure it was the former. For a moment, she had thought she was going to lose him again, only this time permanently, but now...

There was a minute where they just stared at each other. The world was silent as the slightest glow of the dawn's sun began to peak over the horizon. Then, in a voice she hadn't used since she'd been lost all those years, Mikasa spoke.

"Eren?"

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A.N.: Well here you go, Eren and Mikasa finally meet again, as promised. Let me tell you, I had a million different ways for the second half of this chapter to go. I wasn't sure how much drama I should write and how mean I wanted to be. What do you guys think? I won't say anything about next chapter because I always end up being wrong, save for the fact that it will come As always, please keep reading and reviewing, your support is what drives me as a writer. My PM box is also always open for anyone who wants to chat. Until next time, peace out.